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FRENCH AUTHORS AT HOME.

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Episodes in the Lives and Works

OF

BALZAC—MADAME DE GIRARDIN—GEORGE SAND—
LAMARTINE—LÉON GOZLAN—LAMENNAIS—
VICTOR HUGO,

ETC.

64919

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HEROES, PHILOSOPHERS, AND COURTIERS OF THE TIMES OF LOUIS XVI."

ETC.

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VOL. I.

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AVANT-PROPOS.

To some readers in England, and in France, it is thought necessary to explain that two years have elapsed since this present work was written.

In the early autumn of 1862, and beneath the roof of one of those illustrious individuals to whom the following pages are dedicated, a suggestion was made by the writer, which, if carried out, might possibly have extended the plan of this work, and would certainly, in every sense, have increased its interest.

But, since that bright morning in the

south of France, hopes and intentions, literary and social, have been frustrated by unspeakable domestic affliction, which is only here alluded to as an apology, to those who have a right to expect such, for the long-intervening cessation of all private communication on the part of the Author.

London, 1864.

PREFACE.

THE life of Balzac, the novelist, which forms the background of these biographical sketches of some of his friends, who survive him, may serve to illustrate the time of which his works are but the too faithful types. Balzac intended that his "Comédie humaine" should be universal in its portraiture of men and manners. The scheme was gigantic, but the genius which conceived it was French; and in the works of Balzac, generally, *l'homme c'est le Parisien;* nevertheless, these works are read not only out of Paris, but beyond France, and in this fact lie the germs of

moral mischief and misapprehension. It may not, therefore, be without some purpose to inquire into the circumstances under which Balzac wrote; and thereby to ascertain, in answer to accusations which by some of the French press have been made against him, whether he himself deserves to be placed under a ban.

Balzac was born, in the time of oppressed and oppressors, just when France, weary of the evils which anarchy had entailed, was looking to the morning-star of Napoléon I. as the sign of deliverance. The sacrilegious axe had been laid to the root of religious worship, and the most sacred relations of life were subverted. Divorce and illegitimacy had become general.

This being the case, even before the era of the Consulate, the social and political consequences of the unhallowed period

when Balzac was born were ripe when he reached maturity. He was, both as man and author, cradled by revolutions. Born at the close of the last century, his works first attracted public attention in the time portentous of the dynastic change which made Louis Philippe King of the French; and his fame was fanned by the revolution by which, in 1848, some of his brethren of the pen were raised to political power, and subsequently doomed to political exile.

In France, literature and politics have always shown a proverbial tendency to react, either for good or evil, upon each other. Napoléon I., notwithstanding his attempts to do so, did not succeed in commanding an Imperial literature; which failure seems to suggest that literature degenerates without a just tribunal, and in danger of li-

centiousness without the curb of criticism, is nevertheless in need of liberty for the attainment of strength, and maturity, and longevity.

France, in her past history, proclaims this need; and none the less, perhaps, for seeming exceptions, which—though sometimes cited to maintain a contrary argument — are here slightly glanced at in proof rather of the irrepressible vitality of Genius, and its strength to overcome obstacles, than of the power of despotism either to develope or to protect it.

Louis XIV., who is said by a French wit never to have made but one conquest —that of Mademoiselle de la Vallière— knew, even when deified as a hero, that the sword without the pen could neither sustain nor perpetuate the glory of his reign, and, therefore, did he add to its

lustre by centralising French intelligence around his throne. Fortunately so, for the sake of the *grand monarque* himself; who, without the aid of this refulgence, would now be nothing to this world but an unmeaning and unsightly shadow arrayed in a wig.

The throne of Louis XIV. is overturned, his laurels are dead, but all memory of him cannot fade whilst such names as Corneille, Racine, Molière, endure. Nevertheless, despotic monarchs are not always free themselves: no, not even to bury a pet comedian by whose pungent wit the emasculated pedantry of the Hôtel Rambouillet had been embalmed. In life had Molière more than once declared, through the medium of his *Précieuses*,—'Pour moi, j'en suis tout scandalisé;' but when he himself shocked the

Court, and scandalised the Church by making his sudden exit from the stage of this world whilst playing his own "Malade Imaginaire," the Archbishop of Paris refused to bury him, and the King "regretted it;" but would have been powerless to insure the safe *convoi* of his pet comedian, had not the widow of the latter bribed the excited populace by throwing money from the windows of her house. Molière,

"Tu réformas et la ville et la cour,
Mais quelle en fut la récompense?"

And, the great Corneille, who drew tears from the great Condé, what reward had he?

Much pleasure in his time had Corneille,—Shakspeare of France,—afforded to the drama-loving Cardinal de Richelieu, but by genius and popular favour did he establish the "Cid" triumphant over an

Academic opposition of which that eminent protector of men of letters was the centre.

"En vain contre le *Cid*, un ministre se ligue,
Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue,"

as predicted Boileau; so that when "beau comme le Cid," had become a Paris proverb, and Corneille was again menaced on account of the *Horaces*, he himself declared, "*Horace*, condemned by authority, was absolved by the people;" adding, at a later date,—

"Qu'on parle mal ou bien du fameux Cardinal,
Ma prose ni mes vers n'en diront jamais rien.
Il m'a fait trop de bien pour en dire du mal;
Il m'a fait trop de mal pour en dire du bien."

Long after the famous Cardinal's death, Boileau, the satirist, protested that, as historiographer of France, he was ashamed

to receive the King's bounty whilst the pension of Corneille was withdrawn.

And Racine, the other historiographer of the great monarch's reign, he too had some cause to complain, as did "Figaro" in the next century: "We authors, historians, tragedians, comedians, are free—beneath protection—provided that in our writings we speak not of authority, nor of worship, nor of politics, nor of morality, nor of people in place, nor of corporations in credit, nor of shows, nor of anybody nor anything of importance."

Racine! condemned by court favour and Madame de Maintenon to write Tragedy for the young *comédiennes* of Saint Cyr, and doomed to die of despotic displeasure because, presuming upon that favour, he dared to draw up a memorial in behalf of an oppressed people!

And the meek and gentle Fenelon; let us, with a low reverence, here pass by him bending in seclusion over his proscribed "Telemachus;" and then, through a crowd of French preachers—the only tolerated critics of the court, (but who hurled the mighty Bull Unigenitus against king or unanointed layman who dared to criticize themselves) we—moving on—find ourselves amongst the *Encyclopédistes*, and oppositionists, of the next century, of whom and of which stands forth the chief—Voltaire.

Voltaire, for a brief season the *protegé* of Versailles, by favour of the Pompadour, and for twenty years subsequently the proscribed of Paris by the monarch who, whilst letting the state slip through his fingers, declared, "*Le Roi c'est moi!*"

Voltaire, whose name was the rallying

cry of antagonism to despotic authority; Voltaire, 'l'homme qui détruit, et l'homme qui construit,' beneath whose exiled banner *Encyclopédistes* ranged themselves into columns; thereby manifesting the collective force of individual talents which, if exercised at home in achieving timely reform, might have inaugurated social regeneration instead of sanguinary revolution; and thus have saved, not sacrificed, the innocent!

True it is, that in the eighteenth century, Catherine, autocrat of Russia, and Frederick, military king of Prussia, both offered a refuge to the expatriated philosophy of France; but Genius revolted against the political expediency of the former, in proportion as it resisted being marshalled into rank and file by the latter. For, as just hinted, Genius needs

faith as well as liberty,—faith in the power which protects its liberty—the faith of a child in its parent. Once in a child restrict the sublime sense of expansion, of liberty and faith combined, and it seeks refuge in acts of stealth—that sort of stealth by which, not only young ladies in French convents of the last century were wont to weep over the "Nouvelle Heloïse" of Rousseau, but by which, in the world of Paris, men and women then were stung into resistance against time-honoured customs by interdicted works, such as Rousseau's "Contract Social."

If, before the time when Voltaire was an exile at Ferney, when Rousseau was a misanthrope amongst his *Montagnards,* when antagonism was the strength of union amongst exiled French philosophers whose name was Legion, and when in Free-

masonry, not in Freedom, consisted the signs of international communication,—if, before that time, some living voice had dared to say to 'his most Christian majesty' of France "Be *Free!*" But this word not even the Pompadour, protector and *protegée* of Montesquieu, had dared with impunity to utter to Louis XV.; and when, in senile weakness, that miserable monarch beheld, and unavailingly bewailed the fact, that he had become the slave of his own vices, ministerial short-sighted and selfish policy had done its work, the age of Anarchy had begun,—the inevitable decree had gone forth, and no individual virtue, not even that of the next descendant of Saint Louis, had strength to burst asunder the chain of consequences.

Wherefore, when, after the massacre of the innocent, Anarchy had, with blood-

stained hands, forged for itself new fetters of Despotism,— the voice was stifled which essayed to exhort citizens, poets, and heroes: 'Be free, be virtuous; respect that which you love; seek immortality in love, and divinity in nature; sanctify your soul as a temple, and the angel of noble thoughts will not disdain to enter therein!"

Madame de Staël, the Sibyl of romance who uttered these words, was, during the early youth of Balzac, in Switzerland and Germany; and Chateaubriand, the poetical Genius of Christianity, had then no definite abiding place in France; it can, therefore, hardly be wondered at, that when an amiable monarch, who in the contracted sphere of his exile had learnt the habit of soliloquising laudatory stanzas addressed to himself, was restored to the throne of France, the finical pedantry of the Hôtel

Rambouillet also showed signs of resuscitation.

But, Paris threatened by the rehabilitation of the *Précieuses*, again cried out, '*Molière, où va-t-il se nicher?*' And in answer came the echo of Molière's last word "Juro;" an echo caught up and repeated by Balzac, who, as a new Master of Romance, protested that, in the portraiture of then contemporary modes and manners, "*le beau c'est le laid.*" Victor Hugo, also, then introduced the popular, or modern, drama in the theatres of Paris.

This mirror of society, thus held up by the Realist of Romance and the democrat of the Drama, was welcome to Paris, then as ever in need of excitement; god-like kings, and antique heroes, went out of fashion; and the representation of the tragedy of every-day life made people weep for themselves.

By satire social wrongs were scourged; but, to redress these, something more was needed than either literary or dramatic realism.

The Revolution of 1830 naturally, as shown by Dumas, and illustrated by Victor Hugo in his own dramatic experiences, mitigated the censorship of the press; there was no longer the difficulty which had hitherto been found in representing on the stage either a mortal monarch or a repentant Traviata; but, if comparative freedom were secured, tranquillity was as far from the impatient heart of Paris as before the constitutional convulsion, which necessarily required time to right itself.

Many were the interdicted pieces which were now precipitated upon the public by the theatres; the masters of Realism had

already not only their disciples but their imitators, who shocked readers and audiences by licentious portraiture which was banefully used but to cover the poverty of their own ideas,— the want of originality.

Hence, therefore, the need of a new censorship— that of Criticism.* In the course of the ensuing work, M. Jules Janin, prince of French critics, finds an unworthy place as one who — born to command and to condemn — resisted in his youth (according to a bygone *on dit*

* Under the banner of the "Revue de Paris," French talent — including Balzac, Dumas, &c.— had, in 1829, essayed to range itself; but for the "Revue des Deux Mondes," which, as a new star in the political and literary hemisphere, appeared in 1831, it was reserved to exercise a lasting and a still increasing influence over the fate of statesmen and authors. Shielded by this new power, and stimulated by its *cher et bon diable*, Buloz, the genius of Madame George Sand first acquired strength to survive her

which he is great enough to pardon) the yoke of servility. Having fought his own way to fame, many are those who, in literature and the drama, have found an upward path opened to them by his pen, for the critical use and not the caustic abuse of which the world at large has cause to thank M. le prince Jules Janin; but this being allowed, on behalf of the prince, what words are left wherewith to hail the king of French critics—M. de Sainte Beuve!

adversaries. Théophile Gautier, (who, often in the course of the following volumes, takes up the thread of their narrative) having been sought, on account of his talent, by Balzac, as contributor to a journal which the latter had instituted, was thus led behind some of the scenes of that author's life. It was Jules Sandeau, pupil of Delatouche, and, at one time, as we shall see, literary collaborateur of Madame George Sand, who introduced Gautier to Balzac.

M. Sainte Beuve, who, though keeping pace with his times, has never yet been convicted of having exercised, or succumbed to, an unjust authority,—M. Sainte Beuve, who sustained Victor Hugo in 1828, but whose sympathies have been renewed with the later youth of France,—M. Sainte Beuve, who first welcomed the Ideal in the form of Madame George Sand,—of whom, speaking of that author in conjunction with this critic of her youth, a Frenchman out of France (in 1861) declares, "Il nous semble les voir, comme Obéron et Titania, fêter leurs noces d'argent dans le monde de l'idéal, avec leurs couronnes de myrtes et de laurier toujours vertes."

To M. Sainte Beuve (whose "Causeries du Lundi" form not only a criticism, but a history of contemporary literature, a

portrait-gallery, and a biographical library), —to M. Sainte Beuve, as critic, Madame George Sand was welcome just because Idealism — in that day of '*isms*' — was wanted, at the time of her first appearance in the world of letters, if only as a counterpoise to the Realism of Balzac.

In the first interview of Madame Sand with the prince of critics, Jules Janin, (an interview which had nothing whatever to do with her own literary interests) she says: "I found in him a *bon garçon*, without affectation or any display of vanity, who had the good taste not to show his wit but by necessity, and who spoke of his dogs with more love than he did of his writings. As I also loved dogs, I found myself much at my ease. A literary conversation with an Unknown would have frightfully intimidated me."

Of M. Sainte Beuve, Madame Sand declares, "His conversation, with its abundant and precious resources, was very salutary to me . . . . with delicate solicitude did he succour me . . . I regard it as a duty to reckon him amongst my intellectual and intelligent benefactors."

But M. Sainte Beuve, a king amongst French critics, felt, as before said, the need of Madame George Sand, an Ideal Queen of French Romance, for at the time when her genius was first unveiled to the world he knew that "in the soul of France there had long been a sense of void,—a vague want *to believe;* a terror of the Infinite." The dreams of Germany had been in some sort interpreted to her country by Madame de Staël, but they had vanished into thin air in the atmosphere of Paris, where social and political problems which

produced nothing but perplexity, various systems for the amelioration of the human race (some of them sown by the seeds of eighteenth-century philosophy) which produced nothing but schisms, schemes of ecclesiastical and educational reform, which ended in the apostasy of Lamennais and the reproduction of the Monastic Idea of Lacordaire, were now all successively tried, and all, more or less, found wanting.

The new literature of Realism was exciting, but oppressive at a time when there was a general gasp for air, for space, for belief—belief if only in the Nature portrayed by Bernardin St. Pierre or by Rousseau in the last century.

Welcome, therefore, not only to Sainte Beuve, but to Paris, was *Idealism* under the banner of Madame George Sand. So

many passages from the life and works of this illustrious writer are contained in the following volumes, that it needs here but to inscribe her name;—"*George Sand;*—c'est le cri de guerre des amants de l'idéal."

Meanwhile, the heart of Paris had been kept open for the reception of the ideal in Romance, by having thrilled, from time to time, in response to the Harmonies and *Méditations* of Lamartine, which were as notes of music from another and a better sphere. Nevertheless, this great poet—as he himself will presently tell us—was not satisfied by Poetry alone. And still less could Ideal Romance be satisfied with the Realities of Paris life. Hence, partly, the conjunction of talent which served to stimulate the Revolution of 1848, and which helped, by force of imagination

rather than principle, to bring about the Republic that preceded the death of Balzac, as the Republic of half a century before had preceded his birth.

In France, in 1848, literature and politics had become identical; even Paris journalism was then represented in the "Courrier de Paris," by Madame Émile de Girardin, the former improvisatrice of France. And none more than she as such, could sympathize with the great poet of her country—Lamartine. United by social ties, as we shall presently find, to Lamartine and also to Victor Hugo, she declares (in 1838), "Both of these men seek to accomplish the same work, although by an opposite means; . . . both write the same history, the history of the human soul; although of this, the one records the good, and the other the evil.

Lamartine, with his pensive and poetic look, regards the beautiful. Victor Hugo, with his observing and dramatic glance, studies the horrible. The one may be called master of the school for the elect; and the other may be called master of the school for outcasts; thus, in their sublime instinct they share the world; the one has chosen earth, and the other heaven."

What this journalist (who in her youth, as poetess, had been crowned at Rome and in Paris) declared of Balzac the Realist, and what Madame George Sand declares of her—the "tenth Muse"—will be divulged in the course of the following pages.

By selecting the life of Balzac for the background of the following life-sketches of his contemporaries, the additional interest of a continuous narrative may possibly be

imparted to them; to the general reader this may be welcome, although to critics it may be a matter of complaint, that, as all the biographies are consequently interwoven in the concluding chapters of the narrative, not one of them, taken separately, is compact. But (putting aside the fact that the mortal career of some of the immortals, with whom we have here to do, is not yet closed) no life in this world can ever be complete; neither can it stand apart uninfluenced by the lives of others. Least so the lives of those French celebrities—poets, novelists, dramatists, and politicians—whose union had strength to bring about the Revolution of 1848.

But before opening these biographies, the reader is warned that, by a portion of the French press opposed to Balzac, that author has been accused, amongst

other things, of having tried to sell his pen to the Emperor of Russia; of having allowed one of his sisters to die a pauper in an hospital, whilst he himself was living a life of licentious self-indulgence; and of having sapped the foundations of society. Three of his brother authors and friends have helped, by their separate records, quoted in the following pages, to refute these accusations; although Balzac's own words here at once declare his reverence for religion, and for the sanctity of domestic life. "La base des sociétés humaines sera toujours la famille . . . la religion exprimée constitue la seule force qui puisse relier les espèces sociales et leur donner une forme durable!" Neither may it be out of place here to say that from the evidence of his other and surviving sister, (with whom, in

later life, he daily associated) so sensitive as to innocence and youth was Balzac behind the scenes, that he not only forbade her daughters — his nieces — to read those of his works which were most popular, because portraying certain phases of Paris life in his day, but that for them he expressly wrote some of his volumes which represent life untainted by time, or triumphant over temptation.

Balzac is not didactic; but, nevertheless, a hint from him may thus be pardoned as not unseasonable with regard to the necessity of family censorship in this our day, when not only English sensation novels are rife, but also French vile imitations abound of his own most objectionable works, which parodies are translated with gross freedom for the misuse of *purely* English readers.

To be realist, asks a living student of French contemporary letters,—to whom some foregoing and following remarks are due,—to be realist is it to imitate Balzac, or simply to paint nature? "For a great number, unhappily, the imitation of Balzac has been the easiest method of creating a new literature. But this imitation, instead of producing realism, has brought forth nothing but affectation,—the affectation of the wicked, of the hideous, of the horrible, —the worst of all affectations. True realism is the result of original and patient observation. It is the sentiment of reality experienced by a writer beyond the pale of all scholastic influence; to whom, by a slight variation, may be applied a common proverb, 'The original author has no need of ancestors.'"

And still less can Ideality be deve-

loped by an attempted imitation of Madame George Sand, whose inspiration was forced into utterance by facts unusual as itself.

Descendant of a royal martial hero, the fame of her pen equals, if not transcends, that of his sword. Daughter of the people, she has suffered for the people's cause; whilst the fatalities of her own individual life were peculiar to a time when, in France, the only safe foundations of civilized human society were shaken.

More than enough, however, has been said here; but the following volumes may not be altogether useless if containing some proof that George Sand, the Idealist, and Balzac the Realist, are both essentially inimitable.

CHAPTER I.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

Balzac's birth — Infancy and childhood — Earliest studies — Madame De Staël — Balzac's first flight from home — College of Vendôme — Monastic discipline — First anguish of genius — "Power of Will" — Youth in Paris — Balzac's early home and chums — Terror of conscience — Parental convocation — Choice of a vocation.

Upon the 16th day of May, in the year 1799, there was joy in a house at Tours, because a man-child was born. The house still stands with the number "45" upon its door, but the name of the street is changed; in 1799 it was known as "The Street of the Army of Italy," but since then it has been called the "Rue Impériale."

"When man is born, he weeps and others smile; when man dies, he smiles, and others weep," says the Indian proverb.

And never, perhaps, was the first half of this saying more verified than in the house at Tours upon the day of the year above named; although as the mother—"a superior woman"—laughingly declared: "This man-child knew not, as yet, the meaning of his own voice."

"But," merrily protested her husband, "it is not possible for *me* to be the father of a fool."

This husband and father was a would-be philosopher, wont to be didactic over Montaigne, and to wax jovial over Rabelais; he had lived (as we see from the year of grace above given) through the Reign of Terror, and now hailed his son's birth in the age of Reason and Republic, when venerable creeds and dates were suppressed—in the year 8 of anarchy—in the dawning day of him

Whose game was empire, and whose stakes were thrones,
Whose table, earth—whose dice were human bones.

And yet, though a would-be wit and philosopher, the father of the man-child—born in the small house at Tours in the time of blood and infidelity—consulted the Almanac,—the old-world Almanac,—for an augury as to the date of his son's birth.

In gleaming golden letters the Almanac declared it to be the festival day of "*St. Honoré.*"

"A good sign!" chuckled both parents; and the child was called *Honoré* de Balzac.

"Plant a tree," said the mother; "as the tree grows, so will this child thrive." And a tree was planted by the father's hands in the yard at the back of the house.

It was an acacia-tree; which tree is considered in France to be typical of love, because of its tremulous leaves and butterfly blossoms.

Generations have passed away since that tree was planted, but it still flourishes in the yard at the back of the small house at Tours.

The young Honoré grew, as did the tree; and at four years of age he liked nothing better than to sit beneath it, listening to the rustle of its leaves, and catching its white blossoms as they fell around him.

"The child is as quiet as a mouse," said his mother. "What has become of the voice he had when he was born?"

His sisters were his willing slaves. "Amuse him," commanded their mother; and, forthwith, they would spread their

choicest toys before young Honoré; but he only pushed them aside, and, sighing, continued to gaze upward at the light quivering through the leaves of the tree,—as if, said the gossips, he were spell-bound by some fairy, although his sisters stood, as the gossips also declared, like guardian angels, on either side of him.

At last, one fair-time at Tours, a little fiddle was brought to him, and he smiled with delight when he drew the first sound from it.

"Sister Laura," he cried, "sister! ah! dost thou not hear what beautiful music it makes?"

"*Ma foi!*" she exclaimed, clapping her hands to her head, "my ears are flayed." Whereupon young Honoré, much scandalised, rushed from the house

to the yard behind it, and there, seated beneath his acacia-tree, he continued to play his fiddle: to him there was a celestial harmony in its discord; for his big black eyes, upraised, were bright with tears of ecstasy.

"And only to think," said his mother, "that that toy which cost but twenty-five sous at a booth in a fair, should be the first to please him! But, bah! the horrid noise it makes!" and she, too, with her fingers in her ears, was obliged, in self-defence, to leave the boy alone in his first glory.

At five years of age young Honoré persisted in reading the Bible, to the consternation of all good Catholics at Tours (although that was the city, be it remembered, in which Reformers and

Scripture students distinguished themselves in the so-called religious wars of France, and where Protestants were first called Hugonots.)

The boy's memory was prodigious. He had a passion for reading; but his chief delight was in books of a mystical tendency. As he himself says long afterwards: — "*Abyssus*, *Abyssum*. Our mind is an abyss which rejoices in depths. Children, men, old men, we have all a sweet tooth for mysteries, under whatever form they may present themselves."

Chance favoured Honoré's passion for reading. His mother possessed all the works of Swedenborg, and a neighbouring curé was the owner of a fine library, which had accrued to him from the pillage of the mob, when, during the Revolution,

surrounding abbeys and châteaux had been ransacked.

When the fury of the people had raged in France, many a fine work was sold, not for its worth, but by its weight; and this curé, in his quality of *prêtre assermenté*, had contrived to barter, according to his own account of himself, many a pound of bread for a world of genius! It does not appear how far the curé himself was the gainer by this exchange, but Honoré revelled in the treasure which seemed to have been accumulated expressly for him before his birth. At eight years of age he would often start for the woods at daybreak, laden with books, and with only a dry crust of bread in his pocket. His parents grew accustomed to these flights, although frequently he did not return home until

late at night, and then with clothes torn by brambles, having passed the whole day reading in the most secluded spot he could find. Sometimes the ecstatic St. Theresa was his companion; sometimes the mystical Madame Guyon; in spirit he beheld the visions of the one, and was absorbed in the reveries of the other. "St. Theresa and Madame Guyon were a continuation of the Bible to him, and habituated him to those quick reactions of the soul of which ecstasy is at once the means and the result."

In after years, when describing this period of his life (under the pseudo name of *Louis Lambert*),* he declares

* The identity, upon the points above named, of Louis Lambert and Honoré de Balzac is declared by Théophile Gautier, who was the confidant of Balzac at the height of his fame, and until his death.

that his imagination, stimulated by the perpetual exercise of all his mental faculties, was developed to such a point, that he beheld the things of which he read as vividly as though they were actually before his eyes. For example, in a written account of the battle of Austerlitz:—"I saw all the incidents," says he; "the roaring of the cannon and the cries of the combatants sounded in my ears. . . . I smelt the gunpowder. I heard the tramp of the horses, and the cries of their riders. I beheld the plain where armed nations clashed against each other, as though I had stood upon the height of Santon. It was a spectacle fearful as a page of the Apocalypse."

In the same way did he realise heaven and hell. Swedenborg, by the work so entitled, had appealed to the souls of

Frenchmen in the middle of the eighteenth century, just as the Revolution, which closed that century, began to cast its shadows before it. Like the Athenians of old, Frenchmen were then eagerly watching and waiting for something new. Impatient of restraint—restraint of creed, and custom, and convention—the more thoughtful amongst Frenchmen yearned towards the Infinite in politics and in religion. Prophets were then welcome to Paris; and in quick succession did the mysticism of Swedenborg, the magnetism of Mesmer, the magic of Cagliostro, and the new-world liberty of Dr. Franklin, find in that city—the boasted centre of civilisation—ardent disciples. It, therefore, came to pass that Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" was then translated into French, although when the century was in its last

decade, that work had ceased to be generally studied, and, indeed, since "the age of Reason" had fallen into disuse altogether. But the child, Honoré, was transported by the visions of the Northern Seer.

One day, this child, with "Heaven and Hell" spread out before him, was found in one of his sylvan retreats by Madame de Staël (who, in the year 1803, had been banished by Napoléon I., from Paris), and the surprise of this meeting was mutual; on Madame de Staël's side, to find a ragged boy in an ecstatic reverie on the border of a wood, which skirted the estate where she was then staying, and on the ragged boy's side, to behold standing before him in the flesh a woman, whose presence seemed to his excited fancy glorious as that of St. Theresa or of Madame Guyon. Suddenly she snatched

Swedenborg's book from the boy's hand—"Dost thou understand this?" asked she.

"Do you pray to God?" asked he, in reply.

"But—yes," said she.

"And do you understand *Him?*" said he.

Madame de Staël was silent; but after a few moments she seated herself by the boy's side, and conversed with him; although in after years the only words that he remembered her to have said were, "Verily, this child is a prophet!"

By some it is supposed that the change which soon afterwards ensued in Honoré's life was partly due to the advice of Madame de Staël to his parents respecting him. He was about this time sent to the Oratorian College of Vendôme.

Proverbially, a prophet is not a prophet in his father's house, and the father of this boy decided that he would be good for nothing in this world without the companionship and discipline of school.

The Oratorians, it will be remembered, had, in the middle of the preceding century, when the Jesuits were expelled from France, succeeded to their place as the authorised instructors of the people. In the meanwhile (from the middle to the end of the eighteenth century), the Oratorian rule had been more lax than that of the Jesuits; its absolute authority over the body and soul of the pupil was less asserted; its system, as a whole, had been less exact, and its creed more latitudinarian; and yet, the Oratorian teacher, as a teacher, had never succeeded in gaining the heart of his

pupil as his Jesuit predecessor had done. Even Voltaire, in his youth, had revered his Jesuit tutor; and in middle age, corresponded with him in terms of friendship and respect. Would Honoré de Balzac, born amid the chaos of the eighteenth century,—which chaos the pen of Voltaire had helped to bring about,—show equal reverence for his Oratorian tutor?

The College of Vendôme, "situated on the lucid river of the Loire, which bathes its walls," had, since the Revolution, undergone vicissitudes, like the men who taught in it; although, for various reasons, this institution had suffered less than others had done from the decree of the Convention, by which such educational corporations had been abolished.

The College of Vendôme had, when

Balzac entered it, returned in a great measure to its primitive laws, half-military and half-religious. The Oratorian teachers, who had been scattered, had reinstated themselves within its walls, and had resumed their ancient rules and customs. It was a world in itself, this College of Vendôme; and the students enclosed in it were for the most part cut off by its regulations from all intercourse with the world without its walls. Once entered, the pupils were not suffered to leave the College until the end of their studies. No vacations were allowed. No rambling beyond boundaries was permitted, save under the care and guidance of the Oratorian Fathers. "Letters to relations," declares Balzac himself in after years, "were obligatory on certain days, as also the confessional; thus, our sins and our

sentiments were cut and dried according to rule. Everything bore the stamp of monastic uniformity. I recall to myself, amongst other vestiges of that ancient Institute, the inspection to which we were subjected every Sunday. We stood in grand array, ranged like soldiers, awaiting the arrival of two directors, who, followed by contractors and majors, examined us under the triple reports of clothing, of hygiene, and of morality. . . . The punishments, formerly invented by the Company of Jesus, and which were as frightful to the soul as to the body, remained here in all the integrity of their ancient programme."

Honoré de Balzac, accustomed to the open air, to the independence of an education left to chance, habituated to thinking in the sunshine, found it hard to sub-

mit to conventual discipline, to walk in rank and file, to live between four walls of a close class-room, in which eighty youths at a time sat silent on hard wooden benches, each one before his desk.

Honoré de Balzac's senses were exquisitely perfect, and the exhalations with which the confined air of the class-room was laden, affected him painfully, and even disturbed the organs of thought. The loss of the country air, in which he had hitherto lived, the restraint, the discipline, all saddened him. With his elbow on his desk, and his head in his hand, he passed the hours of study in striving to get a glimpse, through the high windows of the class-room, of the trees in the court-yard beyond it, or of the sky above it. From his attitude he seemed to be

deeply absorbed in the study of his tasks; but his task-master, observing at length that his pen was motionless, and the paper before him a blank, would cry out, "You are idle, boy!"

Théophile Gautier, and others who, in after-life, knew Balzac well, affirm that at these words the young Honoré was wont to start in terror, as at the sound of a loud and sudden thunder-clap, for the truth was that he had *not* been idle, and his conscience smote him accordingly.

In secret and by stealth he had written an essay on the Power of Will, and he dreaded lest this manuscript,—the revelation of his inner life—hidden away in a box, should be discovered.

Neglecting his tasks, he was absorbed in his theories, by which theories he

thought to complete the works of Mesmer, Lavater, Gall, Bichât, Swedenborg, and Descartes. Like Swedenborg and Socrates, he believed himself to be attended by a familiar spirit,—that an angel was within him. "*Un homme, veut-il obéir à sa vocation d'Ange?*" asks he.

And years afterwards, when his first theories were modified and materialised, when his angel's wings were soiled and clipped, he recurs repeatedly and with reverence, to his first essay on the Power of Will, to "that travail of the silkworm,—a travail unknown to the world, and of which, perhaps, the only recompense was in the travail itself."

Upon an evil day, as it seemed, to young Honoré, the essay was discovered, and by authority dragged forth to light, together with a poem which had been

stowed away by its side. Father Haugoult, a stern Oratorian, was the "regent" for the week when this event took place. The young author of the essay and of the poem was summoned to appear in the class-room before the regent, who displayed before his eyes his long-treasured manuscripts. The young author stood confounded; and his companions of the class-room gathered in a large circle round and about him, each one peering forward to look into his face, and prepared to jeer at him.

"And it is for such follies as this that you neglect your duties," exclaimed Father Haugoult, addressing young Balzac, and holding the manuscripts aloft.

The boy hung down his head; his heart beat fast and loud; he could not speak.

But he could hear the stifled, though contemptuous laughter of his companions. Large tears dropped from his eyes; tears wrung from the first agony of genius unappreciated.

"Poet!" tauntingly exclaimed the regent, pointing at him.

"Poet and Pythagoras!" echoed and amended his fellow-collegians, as, closing round him, they mocked at him.

And, forthwith, the boy heard, over and above the buzz and the sneers of his companions, the voice of the regent, as in tones clear, and cold, and cruel, he declared that the manuscripts were *confiscated.*

Their author stood dumb; once having heard his doom pronounced he could neither hear, nor see, nor feel. His theory,—the revelation of his inmost soul,

was confiscated and became, so he supposed, the property of a Vendôme grocer; being sold to that functionary with the rest of the college waste paper.

The shock of that day told terribly upon young Honoré de Balzac. He became incapable of fixed attention to any given subject. In vain were tasks imposed upon him; he could not learn them. Uncomplainingly he suffered stern penalties for supposed obstinacy and continued "neglect of his duties." He could not even read.

At last, the boy's pastors and masters declared that he *was imbecile.* He was returned to his father's roof as an idiot. His memory was in a chaos; his reason was eclipsed; his attitude was that of an ecstatic, or of one who walks in his sleep with his eyes open. His mother

was in despair, and his father said, "Alas! our son will never be a great man, after all!"

But St. Honoré, who had presided over the boy's birth, was he not good? And the acacia-tree, which was planted at the boy's birth, did it not grow?

At home, under the protection of the one, and beneath the shade of the other, the mist gradually cleared away from the boy's mind. Once more wandering far into the woods, and restored to the sounds, the scents, and the sights, that he loved, his thoughts began to re-arrange themselves.

Once more he was at liberty. Once more the "angel" within him made itself heard and felt. Once more he felt himself strong, and believed in the Power of Will. But in age he was still scarcely

more than a child, and he yearned for sympathy as a child that has known a great grief; so one day, looking at his sisters, with eyes that were kindled by excitement, he said, or rather prophesied, "I shall live to be famous."

But his sisters only laughed at him when he said this; and, ironically bending low — bowing with their hands on their hearts, even down to the ground, before him, they cried, "All hail to the great Honoré de Balzac!"

He was not angered by their irony, for he had already suffered from the preliminary ordeal of genius unappreciated, and this ordeal had blunted the first edge of his sensitiveness; but henceforth he wrapped himself up in a cloak of reserve. Both at home and at college he had hungered for bread, and had received stones.

This fact did not increase his reverence for constituted authority, but it did increase his faith in himself, in the power of his will to triumph over his world that mocked at him, over his flesh that suffered torments beneath that mockery, and over his besetting evil of desultory day-dreams. He resolved to study methodically. "And there will come a time," said he to himself,—"there will come a time when I shall hold up human nature as a mirror to itself, and when the hidden springs of human motive shall be laid bare by me. I will be the Alchymist of human thought, and of human motive."

Fortune favoured him; for about this time (1813), his father's affairs compelled the removal of the family from Tours to Paris, and Honoré was placed in one of the best schools in the capital; here he

conquered his distaste for systematic study, and worked hard. His theory of the Power of Will was thus reduced to practice; and having triumphed over himself, he so quickly gained one scholastic honour after another; that at eighteen years of age he was not only *bachelier ès lettres*, but he followed simultaneously, and with equally great success, the courses of study at the *Ecole de droit*, of the *Sorbonne*, and of the College of France.

Honoré was now no longer regarded at home as an imbecile, although the real nature of his genius was no more understood there than formerly. His father began to think that he would make a clever lawyer, and, ere long, young Balzac found himself by paternal authority perched upon the top of a probationary stool in the office, or

rather study, of the celebrated professor de Merville. Here he met Scribe and Jules Janin, both of whom, like himself, were martyrs to a vocation for which their talents, now patent to the whole world, unfitted them. Indeed, not only was Jules Janin, the future critic, journalist, and satirist, disinclined to his duties as under-clerk, but not having learned to conquer himself as his fellow-sufferer, Balzac, had done, he was more than once, it is said, subjected to certain indignities from his superior clerks, in return for his impertinence to them. This future "Prince of Critics" was kicked?

The family of Balzac resided at this time in the Rue du Temple; and Honoré, when off his office-stool, was still regarded as a child in his father's house, where he lodged, and where he

was expected to comply with the precise rules of domestic routine. At home he taught Latin to his sisters; his mother smiled, and his father did not frown upon him.

"But I was always only eight years of age to my father," says he: "nevertheless, I loved him, for in his heart he was a just man. The wish, even on my part, to swerve from the uniform routine he had traced out for me, would have exposed me to his wrath. He had threatened to embark me as a cabin-boy to the Antilles, if he found me guilty of a first fault. A horrible shivering fit seized me if, by some rare chance, I dared for an hour or two venture to join a party of pleasure. Fancy an imagination the most vagrant, a heart the most loving, a soul the most tender, a mind the most

poetic, for ever in presence of the coldest man in the world. In short," continues he, under a pseudonym, "marry a young girl to a skeleton, and you will understand my existence at this time; projects of flight, which vanished at the sight of my father; griefs that were calmed by sleep; desires that were compressed; sombre sadness that was dissipated by music! I exhaled my misery in melodies. Beethoven and Mozart were my discreet confidants. I smile to-day in recalling to my mind all the prejudices which at this period of innocence and virtue troubled my conscience. Had I put my foot inside a *restaurant* I should have believed myself ruined; my imagination depicted a *café* as a place of debauchery, where men lost both honour and fortune; as to risking money in gam-

bling, it would have been first essential to have money to risk.

"Once I was at a ball—but that you may perfectly comprehend my position there, know that I wore a patched coat, clumsily made shoes, a cravat fit for a coachman, and worn-out gloves. I placed myself in a corner, where at my ease, I could take ices and contemplate pretty women. My father perceived me. For some reason, that I never attempted to guess,—so much did this act of confidence overwhelm me,—he gave me his purse and his keys to take care of for him. I took them. At ten paces from me some men were playing. I heard the gold rattle. I was just upon twenty years of age, and I desired to pass a whole day plunged in the crimes of my age. It was a *libertinage d'esprit.* . . . For

a year past I had dreamed of myself well dressed, seated in a carriage, with a beautiful woman at my side, dining at Véry's, going to the theatre at night, and not returning to my father's house until the next day. I calculated that all this joy would cost fifty crown pieces. So, with my father's purse in my hand, I slipped away that night of the ball into a small empty room which was near me, and there, with eager eyes and trembling fingers, I counted my father's money. One hundred crowns!

"Evoked by this sum, the delights of my long-dreamed-of escapade appeared before me, dancing like the witches of Macbeth around their caldron, but witches alluring, trembling, delicious! I became in one instant a determined rogue. Without listening either to the tingling

in my ears, or to the violent throbbings of my heart, I took two twenty-franc pieces;—(I see them still! Their dates were rubbed out, but the features of Buonaparte made a wry face upon them at me.) After having put the purse into my pocket, I returned towards a play-table, holding the two gold pieces in the damp palm of my hand; and then I roamed round and round the players, like a hawk round a hen-roost. A prey to inexpressible agonies, I suddenly threw a quick glance around me. Then, certain of not being seen by anybody I knew, I betted upon the game of a fat and lively little man, upon whose head I heaped, in one moment, more prayers and vows than he would have made for himself at sea during three storms. Then, with an instinct of villany or of Machiavelism, sur-

prising at my age, I went and planted myself near a door, from whence, assuming an air of indifference, I looked across the *salons* without seeing anything. My soul and my eyes flew round and round the fatal green table. From that evening dates my first experience of a power to which I owe that species of penetration which has since permitted me to seize some mysteries of our double nature. My back was turned to the table where my future happiness,—a happiness the greater, perhaps, because it was criminal — was contested; between the two players and myself was a hedge of men, talkers, four or five ranks deep; the hum of voices mingled with the noise of the orchestra, and rendered it impossible to distinguish the clink of gold; yet, notwithstanding all these obstacles (by a privilege accorded to

the passions, and which gives to them the power of annihilating space and time) I heard distinctly the words of the two players,—I knew their points,—I knew which of the two played the king as though I had seen the cards: in short, though I could neither watch nor hear the game, I turned pale at every one of its caprices.

"Suddenly my father passed before me; and then did I comprehend those words of Holy Writ, 'The Spirit of God passed before his face!' But, I had won. I ran to the table, slipping through the vortex of men who gravitated round the players with the dexterity of an eel which escapes through the broken mesh of a net. Every fibre in my body now thrilled with joy, instead of pain, as just before. I was like a condemned criminal, who, marching to execution, has met the king. By chance

a man, who wore decorations of honour, claimed forty francs which were missing. Restless eyes were turned towards me. I was suspected. Drops of sweat ran down my brow. The crime of having robbed my father seemed to me avenged.

"But the good little fat man then said in a voice that to me was certainly angelic, '*Tous ces Messieurs avaient mis*,' and paid the forty francs. I raised my head, and cast looks of triumph on the players. After having restored to my father's purse the money I had taken from it, I left my winnings to the honest and worthy little fat gentleman, who continued to win with them; and as soon as I saw myself the possessor of a hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them up in a pocket-handkerchief, in such a way that they could not clink against each other on our way home.

"'What did you do at the gambling-table?' asked my father as soon as we were seated in the hackney-coach. . .

"'I looked on,' said I, trembling.

"'But,' replied my father, 'there would have been nothing extraordinary if, by self-love, you had been tempted to risk some money on the table. In the eyes of the world you appear old enough to commit follies. . . . . I would have excused you had you even made use of my purse. . . .'

"I did not reply. When we reached home, I restored his keys and his purse to my father, who, having entered his own room, emptied the purse on the mantel-shelf, counted the gold, turned towards me with rather a gracious air, and said to me, catching each sentence by a pause more or less significant, 'My son, you'

will soon be twenty years of age, I am satisfied with you. You need a settled annual allowance, were it only to teach you to economize. Henceforth, dating from this evening, I shall give you one hundred francs a-month. You may dispose of your money as you please. Here is the first quarter's payment in advance for this year.'

"I confess that I yearned to throw myself at his feet, to declare to him that I was a thief—that I was infamous,—and, even worse than that, a liar. Shame restrained me. I went forward to embrace him; he repulsed me, feebly.

"'Now,' said he to me, 'thou art a man, *my child.* . . . If I have any right to your gratitude,' he continued, in a tone gentle but full of dignity, 'it is for having preserved your youth from misfortunes

which engulph all young people in Paris. Henceforth, we are friends.'

But the father, unsuspicious that his son was a genius, or not choosing to recognise that fact, had predetermined for him a dull, dry, prosaic career. The father and the son took opposite views of life; they regarded the world from different points of view: to the one it was refulgent and rose-tinted, as at the dawn of day; to the other it was leaden-hued and sombre, as at the evening twilight. The son was ardent with hope and enthusiasm; the father was saddened by experience and disappointment.*

Above all things, the father desired

* The father of Honoré had formerly been secretary to the *Grand Conseil*, under Louis XV. His services to the state had been, he believed, but inadequately recognised.

that his son should be independent of the whims and caprices of his fellow-men; he, having realised the truth of the proverb against trusting in princes, and, by the subsequent Revolution (and its sad social consequences), having been taught to doubt the other proverb that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

Besides: there was a friend of the family—a notary—who already gave employment to young Balzac as clerk, and who promised to adopt him as his successor. These law studies were not without their future use to Honoré, though not, as hoped his father, in making of him "an *homme de robe*, who by his knowledge of facts, shall overcome fallacies, and, by amassing solid wealth from the unsubstantial follies of his fellow-

men, shall know how best to regain possession of certain lands of which his family has been unjustly deprived."

But, having entered into a bond of friendship with his son, having, in other words, said to him, "Let us trust each other," the father, though his own purpose was already fixed upon the subject, was bound to make a show of consulting him about his future career.

Therefore, one November evening when he was weary of the dry duties of scrivener's clerk, (*pro tem.*,) Honoré was summoned, formally, to appear before his parents, and, by the first glimpse he had of their faces, he was sure that some grave discussion was pending. He trembled with a momentary feeling of vague apprehension, but they never guessed, judging from his implicit and filial obedience,

since he had been in the lawyer's office, that he would resist their authority. He stood before them.

"My son," said his father, blandly, "thou art nearly of age; it is time to consider the way in which thou may'st earn a livelihood. What vocation wouldst thou choose?"

Honoré looked from his father to his mother, then back again at his father. His dark eyes glistened, his broad chest heaved, but in a clear voice he answered, "Literature."

There was a moment's pause, then, "Art thou a fool?" asked his father.

"No," said the son, "I would be an author."

The father frowned gloomily; the mother became sarcastic.

"It would seem," said she, turning to

her husband, "that our son has a taste for beggary."

"Yes," replied her husband, "there are some folks in the world who are born but to die in an hospital." *

The son stood resolutely before his parents; his arms were folded upon his breast, and his eye was unflinching. His mother saw at a glance that no argument would move, nor satire sting him out of his determination; and, suddenly losing all patience, she showed the parental cards.

"Honoré," said she, "our plans are already determined for thee. Thou wilt

* Hospitals in France were formerly not only asylums for the sick poor, but for paupers and vagabonds. The word *hospital*, therefore, was, in the eighteenth century, to which the elder Balzac belonged, a word almost equivalent to workhouse.

fulfil our will, and thy own destiny, as a lawyer."

Honoré drew back a step, unfolded his arms, and made a vehement gesture of denial.

"But," said his father, "art thou ignorant, unhappy young man, of what an author's trade really is? In literature, a man must either be a scavenger or a king."

And Honoré de Balzac vowed, "I will be a king."

CHAPTER II.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC (*continued*).

Attic life — Solicitude — Ambition — Self-denial — Silent friends — Young author's dream — First tragedy — First critics — First failure — "Sister Laura" — First essays — Author's daily life — Balzac's diary — Literary *hygiène* — *Avater* — Asceticism — Jules Janin — Balzac's first dreams dispelled — His first speculation.

It was now found by his family that Honoré was invincible.

The Oratorian father, in handing over the youth's theory on this power to the Vendôme grocer, had only, by antagonism, confirmed it in practice. Finding that all other means failed to compel his acceptance of the "vocation" they had chosen for him, Honoré's parents tried to starve him into obedience. They went away from Paris into the country, taking his sisters with them; and as he had no money but the annual allowance

made to him by his father, and which was already in part anticipated, his means soon began to fail him. That which, under his father's roof, had been considered wealth as mere pocket-money, was utterly insufficient to supply him in Paris with the necessaries of life,—food, lodging, and clothing.

His parents hoped that poverty would soon drive him back to them. But, no; when he could no longer afford a decent lodging, Honoré went into a garret beneath the roof of a house, which, as he hints, was supposed once to have sheltered Jean Jacques Rousseau.*

The wind blew down the chimney, and in at the window; Honoré caught a bad

* In the Rue Lesdiguières, near the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, in which Balzac was a student.

cold; his teeth ached; his face was swollen; but he was none the less determined to be a king. Meat soon became a luxury beyond his attainment; but he declared, that dry bread was now more convenient to him, as he had no longer any teeth to eat with.

"Ah, my dear Laura!" he wrote to his sister, "thou wouldst. not know me, couldst thou see me. My face is muffled up. Though destined to be a king, I look just now like a *padre doloroso*."

And, meanwhile, he was hard at work on a tragedy, "Cromwell."

From time to time he wrote to his sister about the progress of this work; in one of his letters to her, he says with the self-confidence of youth and inexperienced genius,—

"My tragedy shall be the breviary of

kings and of peoples; I desire either to make my *début* by a *chef-d'œuvre*, or to strangle myself. If thou hast fine thoughts communicate them to me; keep that which is merely pretty to thyself. I need only the sublime."

In exchanging the notary's office for what he elsewhere calls his "aerial sepulchre," Honoré de Balzac had passed, as may be surmised from the foregoing letter to his sister, into a state of self-exaltation.

Years afterwards, speaking of this period of his life, he says, "I worked night and day without relaxation, but with much pleasure; in study I seemed to find the happiest solution of human life. The exercise of thought, the search after ideas, the tranquil contemplations of knowledge, are lavish of ineffable delights. Compelled

as one always is to interpret the mysteries of the spirit by material comparisons, I will say that the pleasure of swimming in a lake of pure water, in the midst of woods, of rocks, and flowers, alone, and caressed by a soft breeze, would give to those who have never experienced it but a feeble notion of the happiness I enjoyed when my soul basked in the rays of I know not what light,—when I listened to the terrible and confused voices of Inspiration, when fancies from an unknown source gushed into my throbbing brain.

"Study imparts a sort of magic to all objects that surround the student. Nothing, in fact, could be more horrible than my garret with its yellow, dirty walls; with its roof which sloped irregularly downward from the broken gutter tiles, through which pierced the light of heaven.

There was just room enough for a bed, a table, some chairs, and my piano, which was wedged in beneath the pointed angle of the wall formed by the roof; but all these things, though humble, were to me as animated friends, the silent accomplices of my future destiny. Many and many a time have I imparted my soul to them, by gazing at them. By constant observation of them, I found that each of these objects had its own physiognomy, its own peculiar character. Often, they even seemed to speak to me. If, from above the house-tops, the setting sun, darting its rays through my narrow window, cast a furtive light upon these familiar things, they would colour, or pale, or glitter; and, under the effect of light or shade, would surprise me continually by new and unexpected aspects. These small

accidents of a solitary life which escape the pre-occupied attention of the world at large, are consolations to the prisoner. And was I not the captive of an idea, imprisoned by a system, but sustained by the perspective of a glorious life to come? I slept upon my lonely mattrass, like a monk of the order of St. Benedict; but Woman, nevertheless, was my chimera, —a chimera which I caressed, but which for ever eluded me. At each difficulty overcome, I kissed the soft hands of an imaginary being, who had beautiful eyes, who was elegant and rich, and who was some day to stroke my hair, and to say to me with tender commiseration, 'Thou hast suffered much, poor angel!'"

At last the tragedy of "Cromwell" was finished, in five acts. This fact was communicated to the author's family by

his sister Laura, and Honoré was invited by his parents to pay them a visit, and to bring his manuscript with him. As it was now quite evident that his determination to pursue literature as a "vocation" was unalterable, the best thing to do, thought the old folks, was to test his capacity for that vocation, and his chances of success in it, by the private opinion of the few learned men with whom they were personally acquainted. Chief amongst these was Stanislas Andrieux, professor of literature in the College of France, and author of "Junius Brutus," and "Anaximandre." Before him and others Honoré de Balzac was called upon by his father to read his "Cromwell."

Anybody who has read his or her own first work aloud, and that in the presence of those prejudiced against it,

can sympathise in this ordeal with the young author who, not long since, had declared that he would make his *début* by a *chef-d'œuvre*, or strangle himself. Far more certain was he of the silent sympathy of his scanty, shabby furniture in his own garret, than that of his own father, or of his father's friends beneath his father's roof.

To "swim alone, caressed by a soft breeze," was very different to being exposed thus, rude and shivering, to the critical inspection of an ungenial company. But there was now no receding: the ordeal must be gone through as part of his destiny; and Honoré de Balzac read aloud, from beginning to end, his tragedy of "Cromwell."

Whilst the reading proceeded, the author's father gazed at Stanislas An-

drieux, and Stanislas Andrieux gazed at the author. The reading, at last, was over. The author, warmed by his own enthusiasm, had in some sort forgotten his audience, and, glowing with his subject, had regained self-confidence.

The reading, at last, was over; and, for a whole minute, it was succeeded by a deep silence. What did this silence portend? Unspeakable approbation, or ominous disapprobation? Still did the author's father watch for a sign from Stanislas Andrieux; and now did the author himself turn his bright, excited eyes towards the face of that formidable critic. Another minute of deep silence, and then did the critic say in the hard, dry tone of a pedagogue: "In the piece that has just been read, I find no evidence whatever of a single germ of talent, or of capacity for

composition on the part of its author." And the author's father said to him, "I told you so."

Saddened and humiliated, but invincible in the consciousness of his own genius, Honoré de Balzac returned from his father's home in the country to his own garret in Paris. He did not strangle himself, although he had not made his *début* by a *chef d'œuvre*, nor produced a breviary for kings and people.

Perhaps his sister Laura sustained him by private assurances of appreciation and sympathy, and had really, at last, some fine thoughts to utter, some sublime consolation to impart; or, perhaps, the criticism by its brutality had aroused the author's indignation, and excited him to fresh endeavours.

Both these influences, most likely, had

a share in preventing the threatened suicide; anyhow, Honoré returned to his garret, to the silent though eloquent accomplices of his future destiny, and, renouncing tragedy, became a romance-writer.

"Only a man of genius or an *intrigant* ever says to himself, 'I have been in the wrong;' though he had failed in his attempts to become a dramatist, that was no reason, argued young Balzac, why he should not succeed as a novelist.

Now, in 1821–2, began his career as a writer, but unsuccessfully. His theory on the Power of Will was tried in practice to the utmost.

Like Alchymists of old (as says M. Sainte Beuve) Balzac passed whole years in groping amongst dust and ashes, dregs and dross, before arriving at the

transmutation so much desired, and so long postponed.

Sixteen romances from Balzac's pen were published between 1821 and 1829, under various pseudonyms, the most familiar of the latter to the public being *Lord R'Hoone*—(*Honoré*, transposed)—but during that period he was the author of more than twice as many works, for those who enjoyed his friendship in later life declare that one of the most conspicuous objects in Balzac's house was a book-case containing thirty or forty volumes magnificently bound; to which he frequently pointed as his failures, though these failures were called by him "*Mes Études*." (Balzac's garret in the Rue Lesdiguières, was, during these years of groping, exchanged for another attic abode in the "Street of the Golden King.")

"Oh! to be celebrated and to be loved!" wrote he to his sister; but, whilst passionately yearning for fame and love, what sort of life did he live at this time?

"Three-pennyworth of bread, and two of milk, and three of sausage meat," says he, "prevented my dying of hunger, and kept my brain singularly clear. My lodging cost me three sous a-day. I burnt my midnight oil for three sous. I was my own housemaid. To save the washer-woman, I wore flannel shirts. I warmed myself by charcoal, which is cheap and cheerless.

"When I first went into my aerial sepulchre, I had by me enough clothes, linen, and hosiery, to last me three years, but I only dressed myself when I went to the public libraries, and into the public thoroughfares."

The old woman of the house, seventy years of age, and called by Balzac in his letters to his sister, "*Iris la messagère*," was not a very sprightly attendant, and so he had to wait upon himself. Again, writing to his sister, he says: "This lazy *I* neglects himself more and more; he only goes out marketing every three or four days, and then only to the cheapest tradespeople of this *quartier*, for the knave knows at least how to economise his legs; so that this *I*—thy brother predestined to celebrity—is already nourished like a great man; that is to say, he is dying of hunger.

"Again, unlucky! The coffee upset, makes horrid stains upon my floor, and water is needed to remedy this disaster; and that pure fluid not ascending to my celestial abode,—although on stormy days

it descends but too freely into it — this lazy *me*,—sole footman at my service,—must go far to refill his pitcher . . . Spiders hang up their hammocks in all my corners, and blinding dust makes a sieve of my cracked window-panes, and scarcely allows me to see the clothes-lines with which laundresses ornament house-tops."

Cheerfully did the young author endure all these miseries as part of his probation; and, in after-life, it was a main article of his creed that to achieve great things in literature or in art, the utmost self-denial is essential. One of his friends, — Théophile Gautier, from whom we have already quoted, declares: "Having practised his own precepts, Balzac preached to us,—his *confrères* — the strangest *hygiène* that ever was propounded amongst laymen. If we desired to hand

our names down to posterity as authors, it was indispensable, said he, that we should immure ourselves absolutely for two or three years; that we should drink nothing but water; and only eat soaked beans like Protogenes; that we should go to bed at sunset, and rise at midnight, for the purpose of working hard until morning. That we should employ the whole day in revising, amending, extending, pruning, perfecting, and polishing our night's work, or in correcting proofs; or in taking notes, and in necessary study.

"Above all, he insisted on the necessity of absolute purity of life, such as the Church prescribes for monks. 'That,' said he, 'developes the powers of the mind to the highest degree, and imparts to those who practise it unknown faculties.' Timidly we some of us ventured to sug-

gest that the greatest men of genius on record had denied themselves neither love, nor passion, nor pleasure; but Balzac only shook his head and answered, 'They would have done greater things still without the help of women.' One concession he made, though reluctantly, and that was, that we might for one half-hour every year be permitted to see the lady of our affections; but 'write to her,' said he, 'write letters; for letter-writing forms style, and style, declares Buffon, is man.'

"It must not be supposed," the same hand assures us, "that, in prescribing this *régime*,—which Carthusian friars and Trappist monks would think hard—Balzac was jesting, for he was not only perfectly convinced of the truth of what he said upon this subject, but he spoke concerning

it with such earnestness, that some of us, carried away by his eloquence, were even induced to try what we called the *literary hygiène;* with what amount of perseverance our works, alas! may tell too well!"

"For myself," says Balzac, "I accepted all the conditions of monastic life, essential to workers. One only passion carried me out of my studious habits, but that, was it not part of my studies? It was a passion for out-door observation of the manners and morals of the faubourg where I lived.

"As shabbily dressed as the workmen themselves, and as indifferent to decorum, I did not put them on their guard against me. Unnoticed by them I could mix in their crowds, I could watch them making their bargains at shops and stalls; I could

hear them reasoning amongst themselves after leaving their work.

"My power of observation was intuitive. It penetrated into the souls of others without overlooking their bodies; or, rather, so quickly did it seize upon externals that it went instantly beyond them. Like the dervish in the Arabian Nights, who takes to himself the bodies and souls of people over whom he pronounced a certain form of words, I had the power of living the life of the individual upon whom I exercised my faculty of observation.

"Thus, when at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, I met a workman and his wife returning from the theatre, I would amuse myself by following them.

"First, these honest folks would talk of the play they had just seen acted; but,

presently, the thread of their gossip would wind round to their own affairs. The mother, leading her child by the hand, would not listen to its complaints or questions, because she was busy reckoning up with her husband what money must be paid to-morrow. In twenty different ways was this money to be laid out; then would come household details, complaints of the price of potatoes, and murmurs at the length of the winter, and against the high price of bread; afterwards energetic representations as to the amount of the baker's bill; and at last came discussions in which husband and wife exasperated each other, and wherein both man and woman depicted their separate characters in graphic words.

"Whilst listening to these people, I was wedded, as it were, to their life; I felt my feet in their worn shoes; I felt their

ragged clothes upon my back; their desires, their wants, their hopes, their fears, all passed into my soul, and my soul passed into theirs. With them I chafed indignantly against the overseers of the workshop who tyrannized over them, or against the hard taskmasters who kept them waiting for their wages. To me it was joy,—a species of moral intoxication,—to live the life of another, and to exercise this power at will. This was my passion. Such was my distraction.

"To what do I owe this gift? Is it a sort of second sight? Is it one of those faculties, the abuse of which would lead to madness? I have never sifted out the causes of this power; I possess it; I use it: that is all."

"Balzac," says his friend Gautier, "like the Indian god, Vichnou, possessed

the gift of *Avater; i.e.* of incarnating himself in various bodies; only, Vichnou's Avaters are limited to ten, and those of Balzac are innumerable. He could transport himself into a marquis, a banker, a bourgeois, a man of the people, a woman of the world, or a courtesan."

And Jules Janin, Balzac's old chum in the official study of the Rue du Temple, and now the redoubtable critic of his works, asks, "Where has M. de Balzac gained his knowledge of woman,—he, the anchorite? He knows her as he knows himself; he is equally familiar with her, be she full-dressed or in *négligé;* he dresses her; he undresses her."

But the spirits of the past did not answer to Balzac's call; his *Avater* was limited to the present. Therefore, had he failed in his tragedy of "Cromwell!"

"But," said he, "society itself shall be the historian, and I will be its secretary. In drawing up an inventory of its vices and of its virtues, in chronicling the chief deeds of its various passions, in portraying its various characters, in selecting its principal events, in composing types by uniting many homogeneous characters, it is possible that I may succeed in writing a history but too often forgotten by historians, *i.e.* the history of morals and of manners."

Determined to execute this grand design, Balzac, braving material suffering and laughing his own personal misery in the face, wrote his thirty volumes,—his '*Studies*' as he called them, which were published successively, as says another of his friends, "by vampire publishers, who cling to the cradle of genius only

that they may stifle it in their greedy embraces; whose system is to leave an author to die of hunger whilst working him for their own profit; who sell his books (almost always with a psendonym or by favour of some parasite preface) under the rose, and thus rob him, even of his fame and of his glory."

A dreadful picture this of Paris publishers thirty or forty years since, though scarcely exaggerated.*

But Honoré de Balzac was determined to conquer Paris publishers. He resolved to attain an independent fortune, which would enable him either to publish his own works in his own name, or which,

* Balzac at length fell into the hands of M Levasseur, who, as publisher, proved himself to be above the common instinct of fallen mankind in his relations with that author.

at least, would relieve him of pecuniary anxiety as to their success when they were published. How this fortune was to be realized the next chapter will tell.

Meanwhile, he had determined to print the works of Molière complete in one volume, those of La Fontaine, &c. in other volumes, uniform with Molière, (each volume containing a preface from his own pen) so as to form a complete and compact edition of standard authors. A friend and former college chum of his lent Balzac the money wherewith to carry out this scheme; and it is since acknowledged to have been a good scheme; but Balzac executed it rashly, without taking counsel beforehand with the Paris booksellers; and, from that and other causes, it failed.

Now, therefore, for the first time in his life, Balzac found himself in debt.

The money that had been generously lent to him by his friend must be repaid. But, how?

CHAPTER III.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC (*continued*).

Paternal interview—Family visit—Setting up in trade—Political portents—Old occupation—Debts—Anxieties—Henri Delatouche—Bills of Exchange—Debtors—Conflicts—Life, real and ideal—Address to Woman—Balzac's 'Alchymy'—His championship—His satire—His "Physiology of Marriage."

"THOU see'st," said Honoré de Balzac's father to him one day, when the old gentleman ventured into his son's garret, "thou canst not fail to see that thou art mistaken in thy vocation. A man who reaches the age of five-and-twenty, without being able to earn his own bread, is in a wrong road."

The young man sighed; and, looking at him, the father sighed also; for Honoré was much changed for the worse in ap-

pearance, so much so as to be scarcely recognisable.

The dietary *régime*, which poverty had prescribed for him, the close confinement night and day in a small uncleaned attic (and here let his former life in the woods be realised to mind), the monastic discipline to which he had voluntarily subjected himself, and the consciousness of debt, though all, more or less, favourable to the concentration and lucidity of his mind, had reduced his body to a skeleton. He was ghastly to look upon, though a fierce fire shone in his eyes.

The father, remembering him as he was a few years before, fresh-coloured, broad-chested, athletic, took pity at last upon his son and himself.

"Honoré," said he, "come home for a time." Honoré went home; and the

fatted calf was killed for this son who was not a prodigal, but who was very hungry. With a full stomach, and clothed in clean linen by the hands of his mother and sisters, Honoré seemed to have come back to his right mind, for he calmly discussed with his father the expediency of setting up in trade as a printer.

To print books, thought the elder Balzac, was a far more rational proceeding than to write books; it was to profit by the follies of others, and exactly upon the same principle as that upon which he had formerly desired his son to be a lawyer, the father consented in this case to advance the project. He lent 30,000 francs to Honoré towards the purchase of his stock in trade, and soon afterwards the young man was established at Numero 13, Rue des Marais, St. Germain, where

he set up twelve presses, and assumed an appearance of extreme business activity

All this was, on Honoré's part, but a means to an end—a double end—for now to the desire which had long possessed him of being "celebrated and beloved," was added anxiety to acquit himself of the debt he had incurred to his friend; but that same friend, not less generous than himself, now came forward again, and insisted on lending Honoré a further sum of money, that he might be enabled the more quickly by a larger capital to realise the object he had in view for their mutual benefit.

But, unhappily for young Balzac, it was just now to the interest of government to muzzle the press. The government was in danger, and thinking, by gagging the press, to escape from its own

danger, shackles upon shackles were placed upon the book trade, and all pertaining to it.

It was impossible for Balzac to weather the storm, and a fund, it has been calculated, of 50 or 60,000 livres, would have been essential to his holding on until it had blown over. He could not command that sum, and was compelled to sell off all his stock-in-trade at a loss.* He returned to his vocation of author, poorer than ever, more deeply in debt than before, but with the satisfaction of having done his best to redeem himself from his liabilities.

Henceforth, all calm had fled from

* M. Deberny was the purchaser of Balzac's presses, and it is said that he has since realised 600,000 francs profit from them. Woe to him who, in this life, cannot afford *to wait!*

Honoré de Balzac. To his craving for fame, was now added the feverish impatience to repay the friend who had twice nobly trusted him, and whom he had unwillingly impoverished.

For three years, from 1827 to 1830, he lived in the same house as Henri Delatouche. Of Delatouche, we shall presently get a nearer view; but here, it may be said of him that at this period he was Balzac's best critic and best friend. His criticism restrained Balzac's imagination from flights beyond the power of his readers to follow, and his companionship may possibly have saved Balzac from madness; for, over-sensitive as he was by nature, morbid as he was from disappointment, and working as he was to excess, it was no longer good for him to live alone.

Delatouche may be said to have civilised Balzac. And is it to be wondered at if, following the advice and example of his friends and *confrères*, Balzac now sought distraction in the amusements offered by Paris to young men? He no longer thought of a *café* or a *restaurateur's* as a den of vice and debauchery, and his passion for observing character and manners rendered, after all, his frequenting such and other places more *a libertinage d'esprit* than aught else.

But debts beget debts. And debt, as Balzac himself says, is a hell; but, by a horrible fatality, too well understood, universally, to need explanation, Balzac descended circle after circle, deeper and deeper into that hell of debt. Continuing to write, vehemently, and expecting that every fresh production of his pen was *the*

one destined to bring down a shower of gold upon him, and to pay everybody, "I signed letters of exchange," says he, "at short dates, and quickly did pay-day come round. . . . . But I was not made to grow old, yet; my soul was always young, vivacious, and fresh. My first debt conjured up all my virtues; with slow steps and sad countenances they appeared before me, desolate. But, somehow, I negotiated with my virtues, as with aged aunts, who begin by scolding us, and end by giving us tears and money. Soon, my imagination was roused, and I pictured to myself how my name was travelling from city to city, in various parts of Europe. And somebody has said, '*Our name—it is ourself.*' . . . But those bank men, dressed in grey! Once upon a time, I saw them with indifference prowl-

ing about the streets of Paris, but now I abhorred them beforehand.

"One morning, one of these men came to me. . . . . My signature was worth 3000 francs, and I was not worth so much myself. Who, now, had the right to scrawl my name, to foul it, to mock at it?

"I OWED! To owe, is it to belong to one's self? Could not other men now demand an account of my life? Why had I eaten puddings *à la Chipolata?* Why had I partaken of an ice? Why did I sleep, or walk, or think, or amuse myself, without paying them? In the midst of a poem, in the bosom of an idea, — or surrounded by friends, — I might see a man enter, holding in his hand an unbrushed hat,— this Monsieur is my debt, my letter of exchange; he

will take from me my gaiety, my idea, my poem, my mistress, my all,—even to my bed. Remorse itself is more tolerable than debt; it neither turns us out into the street nor into Sainte Pélagie; it does not plunge us into an execrable sink of vice, as does debt; it only mounts us on the scaffold, where the executioner ennobles us; there at the moment of our punishment, all the world believes in our innocence, whilst Society will not allow a single virtue to the *débauché* who has no money.

"Then those debts, with two soft paws, dressed in green, wearing blue spectacles, and carrying many-coloured umbrellas; those debts incarnate, with whom one finds one's self face to face at the corners of streets; those folks who have the horrible privilege of saying to one, "Ah!

Monsieur owes, and does not pay me.' . . . But one must salute one's creditors—salute them with grace.

"'When will you pay me?' say they. And we are under the necessity of lying, of imploring another man for money, of bending low before a fool who sits upon his money-chest; of submitting to his cool impertinence, to his leech-like look; of enduring his Barême morality, and his gross ignorance."

There is, no doubt, that although before and after this time Balzac is well known to have lived the life of an anchorite, yet that his desire to look well in the eyes of women, to be supposed to have by fortune and position the right to address them, was one cause of his embarrassments.

Woman was still his chimera. Still were his dreams all of that beautiful creature

with bright eyes, soft hands, and tender heart, who should some day stroke his hair, and say, "Thou hast suffered much, poor angel!"

"How much I suffer!" cries he. Truly, as his friend, Victor Hugo, declares of him: "This potent and indefatigable worker, this philosopher, this poet, has lived, in the midst of us, a life of storms, of struggles, and of combats,—storms of adverse circumstance, struggles against destiny, combats between the inner and the outer life, the real and the ideal." In woman did Balzac seek to harmonise the real and the ideal.

"Do you believe, madame," he asks, "that your beauty is so precious to me? Your face, to me, is fair only inasmuch as it is the promise of a soul which is more beautiful than you are. Eh! ma-

dame, men who see in a woman nothing but a woman, can buy such

. . . and be happy . .

But I am ambitious; I desire to live heart to heart with you—with you who have no heart." And, seeking to revenge himself and society, he wrote, "*La Femme sans Cœur.*"

But, though Balzac yearned for companionship of heart and soul, and would fain regard woman as the angel of man's life, he was still a Frenchman in the flesh.

His friend and companion, Théophile Gautier, says, "In the gallery of Antiques, Balzac contemplated the Venus de Milo without great ecstasy; but a Parisian lady, draped in her long cachemire, bonneted and veiled with Chantilly lace, delicately gloved, and raising the hem of her flounced robe so as to show her little

boot, who was standing before that immortal statue, caused his eyes to glitter with pleasure. With infinite zest did he analyse all these alluring coquetries, and dilate upon all these *grâces savantes;* in comparison with which, he implied, the figure of the goddess was clumsy and heavy. Sculptured beauty, with its severe and pure lines, was too simple, too cold, for the taste of this genius, so complicated, so vivacious, so versatile. . . . Character and expression were preferred by him to beauty; therefore, in his portraits of woman, he invariably sets a seal upon her individuality, by depicting either a wrinkle or a vein too conspicuous, or some sign of fatigue, or, in short, some detail small but eloquent of life, its sufferings, its wounds, its passions. . . . He

accepted nothing from the mythologies and traditions of the past; he recognised not, happily for us, the ideal formed from the verses of poets, or the marbles of Greece and of Rome, or from the pictures of the Renaissance, which interpose themselves, conventionally, between the eyes of artists and reality. He loved women such as she is in our own days, and not a pale statue; he loved her in her virtues, in her vices, in her shawls, in her robes, in her *fantaisies*. . . . He prolonged her youth by many years, and derided the blindness of the classic taste of France, which has failed, even after two thousand years, to perceive that roses in our climate flourish not in April, as described by antique poets, but in June; and that our women begin to be beautiful just at

the age when those of Greece and Rome, by many years more precocious, cease to be so."

Surely, this was a creed which could not fail to find favour in France and amongst Frenchwomen! By advocating it, and by becoming the champion of the rights of women against social wrong and human injustice, Honoré de Balzac at length won over to his side at least one half, and that an important half, of the French public. His "Physiology of Marriage," his "Woman of Thirty Years of Age," (and other women decades onward) his "Unhappy Woman," and his "Forsaken Woman," flattered woman's sensibilities, and awoke her sympathy for herself and for the author, who was her champion.

Who was this confessor, physician, and

consoler? Who was this that knew, by some mysterious intuition, the hidden secrets of woman's life, who touched, as by electricity, the most sensitive fibres of her nature? Who was this that held up a mirror to woman in the autumn of life, that period when she most needs sympathy and least finds it, and showed her to herself, still lovely and loveable, and said to her, "Madame, once thou wert pretty, but now thou art beautiful in the character which time, and even sorrow, have developed in thee!" Who was this that declared woman, heartless only in proportion, generally, as she was unloved according to her deserts; and frivolous, generally, only in proportion as she was uneducated according to her capacity? And let it be here remembered, as M. de Sainte Beuve reminds us, that these doc-

trines in woman's favour were enunciated by Balzac in 1829–1830, just as the Revolution of July was about to work and had worked a change in the social position of woman; when St. Simonism and Madame George Sand were just making themselves felt and heard; and when Madame Emile de Girardin was about to satirize contemporary vices and follies, social and political, under the *nom de plume* of *Le Vicomte de Launay*.

The time, at last, was ripe for Honoré de Balzac. It was now that his prophecy, made years before, concerning himself, was in the dawn of its fulfilment; the world at length responded to his genius, and already other countries besides France began to acknowledge him to be the Alchymist of Thought, and to have the power of laying bare human motives, and

human vices, and human virtues to the core, because his genius, like those motives, and virtues, and vices, was, if not universal, at least unhappily applicable, to the time and country in which it manifested itself.

To some in those days, nevertheless, as to many in these days, Balzac's biting and grating satire was harsh and unwelcome;—especially in his "Physiologie du Mariage." That work announced the advent of a modern Rabelais, but its boldness was then, as now, offensive to those whose lives, unlike the life of the author, had been exempt from the storms, the struggles, and the combats to which Victor Hugo has already alluded in these pages, as having been the peculiar destiny of Honoré de Balzac. Women, galled by the chains of social injustice, hailed him

as an emancipator; but from some women, and from many men, it could scarcely be expected that passages such as the following could fail to bring down a storm of indignation on the author's head. Such satire, *if hitting the mark*, is seldom forgiven:—

"Are women to be educated or not? That is the question . . . Away, civilisation! Away, thought! that is your cry. You are quite right to have a horror of educating women, for this reason, so well understood in Spain, that it is easier to govern a nation of idiots than a nation of *savants*. A stupid nation is happy; if it have not the sentiment of liberty, it can suffer neither from the disquietudes nor storms of that sentiment . . . Therefore, you will try to put off as long as possible the fatal moment when your wife

shall ask you for a book. First, you will disdainfully utter the name of *blue-stocking;* and you will explain to her the ridicule which our neighbours attach to pedantic women.

"Then, you will often repeat to her that the most amiable and *spirituelles* women of the Parisian world are those who never read.

"Also: that women are like people of quality, who, like Mascarille,* know everything without ever having learnt anything.

"That a woman, even be she dancing or playing, ought, without having the appearance of listening, to catch up, in the discourse of men of talent, the ready-made

* "Tout ce que je fais me vient naturellement; c'est sans étude?"—MOLIÈRE, *Les Précieuses Ridicules,* scène X.

phrases, out of which fools compose their wit in Paris.

"That in this country, decisive judgments are passed upon men and things, from hand to hand; and that the little cutting tone with which a woman criticises an author, or demolishes a book, or disdains a picture, has more power than a court decree.

"That women are fine mirrors, who reflect, naturally, the most brilliant ideas.

"That natural wit is everything, and that one is much more educated by what one learns in the world than by what one reads in books.

"Finally, that reading ends by making the eyes dim.

"And, behold, what immense resources the education of women has prepared for you wherewith to turn away the one that

belongs to you from her passing taste for knowledge. Examine, with what admirable stupidity girls have lent themselves to the results of the instruction, which has been imposed upon them in France.

"We deliver them up to nurses, to paid companions, to governesses, who, for one noble and true idea which they inculcate, have twenty lies of *coquetterie* and false modesty to teach them. They are reared as slaves, and accustom themselves to the notion that they are in the world on purpose to imitate their grandmothers, to breed canary-birds, to arrange dried plants, to water little Bengal rose-trees, to fill a tapestry frame, or to work themselves collars. So, though at ten years of age, a little girl be more clever than a boy, she is, at twenty, timid and awk-

ward; she is afraid of a spider, she will say nothing, she will think of millinery, she will talk of the fashions. . . . A woman who has received a masculine education possesses, truly, the most brilliant faculties, and those most fruitful for her own and her husband's happiness; but such a woman is rare as happiness itself . . . In making this last matrimonial observation, our object is not to advise all *superior men* to seek *superior women;* we desire not to leave everybody to explain our principles after the fashion of Madame de Staël, who attempted to unite herself to Napoleon. Those two individuals might have been very unhappy in housekeeping . . . In short, when we extol these *not-to-be-found* girls, so happily reared by chance, so conformable by nature, and whose delicate soul bears

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with the rough contact of the great soul of that which we call *a man*, . . . we think of those women who seek no other glory but that of fulfilling their part well in life, yielding themselves with astonishing docility to the will and pleasure of those whom nature has given them for masters; alternately raising themselves into the vast spheres of man's thought, and humbling themselves to the simple task of amusing him as a child; comprehending the caprices of a soul fiercely tormented, not less than a word or a look however small or vague; happy in silence, happy in effusion . . . But let us stop; this picture would carry us too far from our subject, which treats of marriage, and not of love." *

* Yet, in France, as elsewhere, at the time when Balzac wrote this satire, Love and Marriage

Such a woman as he here describes did Balzac find at last, or think that he found, in Madame Émile de Girardin (Delphine Gay), with whom, about this period of his life, he contracted a friendship which lasted to the end of his days.

That we may comprehend the signi-

were often—as now—happily synonymous. From the court down to the lowest scale of society, even at that time, innumerable (amongst myriads of good lives and good deeds, whose record is not of this world) were the blessed and bright examples of connubial sympathy, of marital fidelity, of filial duty, and of widowed constancy.

Nevertheless, it was a time of revolutions; the social soil was vitiated; and rank was the rapid growth of almost every false and fatal philosophy in the tenets of which charity began everywhere but at home. The satirist's shafts were, therefore, needful; and if, as we may see in after pages, they were poisonous to some individual lives, whose fault was that?

ficance, the causes, and the consequences of this friendship, let us here take a rapid glance at the life, public and private, of Madame Émile de Girardin.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME ÉMILE DE GIRARDIN

(DELPHINE GAY).

Birth and Baptism—Parisian ladies rebuked—The young Poetess—Court intrigue—Coronation at the Capitol—First meeting with Lamartine—Coronation in the Panthéon of Paris—Country retreat—Marriage—First prose work—Dujarrier—"Lettres Parisiennes"—Honoré de Balzac—Influence over Balzac—His portrait—His work, "La Peau de Chagrin."

MADAME Émile de Girardin (Delphine Gay) was born about the year 1805, at Aix-la-Chapelle, and was baptized, so it is said, upon the tomb of Charlemagne. Her father was Receiver-general of Finance in the Rhenish provinces, and her mother, Madame Sophie Gay (born Lavalette) was a wit. Her wit cost her husband his place, with its revenue of 100,000 francs a-year. Having one evening, in a public assembly, spoken satirically of the prefect of the department of which M. Gay was

Receiver-general, she found herself, upon the day following, suddenly provided with passports for herself, her husband and five children (of whom Delphine was the youngest), and also with orders that none of the family should re-enter Aix, nor the ancient department to which it belongs.

Furious at this mandate, Madame Sophie Gay started off to Paris, and, failing when she reached the capital to obtain another appointment for her husband as valuable as that of which he was deprived, she is accused of having revenged herself for her disappointment by joining Madame Tallien in opposing government and the Emperor Napoleon; so that when, in 1815, the Duke of Wellington entered Paris, these two ladies, united by their mutual grievances against the fallen Cæsar, were the first to greet the English con-

queror, and to present him with bouquets of violets.

"Mesdames," said the Duke to them, "were the French to enter London, all Englishwomen would be in mourning."

Madame Sophie Gay became a widow. It was then that she turned seriously to literature as a means of subsistence for herself and her children.

She obtained considerable distinction by her pen, but not so much as by her conversation.

The most distinguished writers of the Restoration gathered round her eagerly. Henri Delatouche was at home at her house; and Chateaubriand, Béranger, Casimir Bonjour, Amaury, Duval, &c., were her constant visitors; as also Talma, Carle and Horace Vernet, the Baron Gros, Mademoiselle Duchesnois, and others. The

company talked, laughed, danced, and gambled; for Madame Sophie Gay, it is said, was a desperate player.

But, whatever her faults, she was not jealous of her daughter, Delphine, who in the midst of this society grew up beautiful, graceful, modest, and a genius. At fourteen years of age Delphine read her verses aloud, to her mother's company, and soon she was called the *tenth Muse.* "Béranger sang the beauty of her shoulders, and Chateaubriand sang her smile."

In 1822 Delphine, encouraged by applause at home, sent a copy of her verses to the Academy; the subject of these verses was the sublime devotion of the sisters of Saint Camilla, and of certain French physicians, to the sick and dying in the plague of Barcelona. The choice of this subject speaks well for the heart of the

young poetess, and the style in which it was treated obtained for her the highest encomiums from the Academy. Henceforth, Delphine Gay was regarded as a celebrity of Paris.

Some political plotters there were who had thought to turn her fame and beauty to their own account by espousing her clandestinely to the Comte d'Artois, as that prince had openly expressed his admiration of her when, upon one occasion, he had met her in the apartments of a court lady (the would-be patroness of the young poetess) at the Tuileries.

It was well known that at this time of his life, the Comte d'Artois had renounced all idea of ever again having another "favourite;" but that fact, it was thought by some, was no reason why he should refuse to be bound by ties, sacred

to heaven, though repudiated by the dynastic laws of France.

He, however, had sworn to Madame de Polastron on her death-bed, that no woman should ever replace her in his heart, which henceforth he would consecrate to God; and so the political plotters were defeated, although they did not give up all hope of one day making Delphine Gay their tool, for after the Comte d'Artois had ascended the throne as Charles X., he alluded in terms of high praise to an elegy she had written on the fate of Madame de la Vallière; and, forthwith, emissaries from the court sought and found the 'tenth Muse' at her mother's house; but though they strove to fan her ambition, they succeeded only in exciting her indignation.

At length, however, Delphine received

a mandate from the King, and in obedience to it, she was presented to him at the Tuileries. But Charles X. — the gay Comte d'Artois of former days — appears to have desired this audience merely that he might play the Mentor to his gifted young subject.

"Mademoiselle," said he to her, "your poetic talent is of a very high order. From this day's date you will receive an annual pension of five hundred crowns from my privy purse. This sum will enable you to travel. Inspiration, believe me, is to be found in a long journey, and there are dangers in Paris from which I advise you to flee."

And the King passed out.

Madame Sophie Gay now travelled with her daughter, whom the King had thus really delighted to honour,

through France, and Switzerland, and Italy.

In whatever place Delphine appeared there was an ovation to her talent and beauty; and in Italy she became so popular that, like another Corinne, she was crowned with laurels, and conducted in public triumph to the Capitol.

In 1825, during her residence in Italy, Delphine Gay first met Lamartine. He, the young poet of France, who had just charmed the world by his *Méditations*, was travelling from Rome to Florence, but had paused on his way to visit the cascades of Terni.

"Terni," says he, "is the pilgrimage of genius."

Slowly he ascended to the parapet formed by the rocks, that from thence he might gaze on the cascade below; and

great was his astonishment when he reached this height to behold there, though at first unseen by her, a young and beautiful girl reclining against the trunk of a fallen tree, and looking down, with a sort of fascination, upon the waters rushing and roaring beneath her feet.

It was Delphine Gay, the improvisatrice of France.

The background of dark rock and foliage helped to define the graceful outline of her tall elastic form, clothed in white; her arms, which were of extraordinary beauty, were bare; her left hand supported her head, the long golden curls of which floated in the breeze; her blue eyes were fixed on the torrent; tears of ecstasy were on her pale cheeks, and on the long dark eyelashes, which, when she closed her eyes in silent contemplation, rested on them.

To the poetic imagination of Lamartine she was a sibyl, a goddess. It was a place of all others appropriate to the first meeting between this poet and poetess, whose souls were akin, whose thoughts were already familiar to each other.

It was a place of all others for the beginning of a friendship pure and lofty—a friendship which was apart from and above the world; and which proved in after years too strong for any of the world's adverse tides to overcome, or for its torrents to destroy.

Henceforth, from that moment to the tomb, Lamartine loved Delphine, without, he explains, ever once thinking of her as woman; "for," says he, "I had seen her a goddess at Terni!"

Indeed so spiritualised was his appreciation of her from that first moment of

his beholding her, that the only discord to his soul in her presence was when she laughed. Not that she was less lovely when she laughed, for her mouth was exquisite in form, and her teeth were perfect, but Lamartine had already deeply loved and deeply suffered. From the first moment of their meeting, he looked to Delphine for sympathy, for consolation; and when she laughed it seemed to him "a defect of youth, ignorant of destiny." She was more akin to him as she sat looking down wistfully, but calmly, into the dark and turbulent waters.

Her mother was already known to Lamartine. Madame Sophie Gay, glad of a pleasant travelling companion, presented him to her daughter, and thus he became domesticated with them at the

little inn where they were resting on their way as he was.

Lamartine, irresistibly attracted by the daughter, was impressed more favourably than were many of his countrymen with the charms of the mother. Madame Gay, he declares, "was brilliant in wit, tender and generous; heroic from passion and from courage; faithful to her friends, even to the axe. With the heart of an honest man in the breast of a woman living in corrupt times, she had," says he, "but one defect, which defect was an excess of nature; and this caused her sometimes to neglect that hypocrisy of delicacy which is conventionally called *bienséance*. She had preserved the tragic frankness of ideas, of attitude, and of accent, peculiar to that interregnum of society in France called the Reign of Terror. She seemed

to defy conventionality as she had defied the scaffold . . . . She was more a Roman than a French woman!"

In 1827, during her residence at Rome, Delphine Gay wrote great part of her poem of the "Magdalen." Rome, with its religious, historical, and artistic associations, seems to have fostered her religious enthusiasm. Her patriotism, also, was increased rather than diminished by her absence from her country, for she rejected, at least, one splendid alliance, simply, it is said, because by marrying a foreigner she could never hope again to reside in France. At last she returned to France; just as the friend of her childhood, Baron Gros, had finished the frescoes in the Pantheon of Paris. Within that building, in presence of an illustrious assembly, Delphine Gay read a collection of her own

verses; and there again, as in Rome, was she crowned.

But, in preference to this publicity and perpetual excitement, Delphine loved solitude.

At her own request, she retired with her mother into the country. There, at Villiers-sur-Orge, where Madame Gay possessed a small estate, the Baron de La Grange visited Delphine, and was regarded by observers as an accepted suitor. The marriage, however, was broken off; by some, it is said, because the Baron, upon a closer acquaintance, was repelled by the mother as much as he was attracted by the daughter.

Lamartine visited Madame Gay and her daughter at Villiers-sur-Orge. He was received by them both, and especially by Delphine, as an old friend.

"We had seen each other," says he, "in an hour of emotion, when minutes count as years. The united utterance of an enthusiastic cry in presence of a sublime form of nature, is equal to years of acquaintance." In one moment had Lamartine and Delphine known each other at Terni.

The Baron La Grange had discontinued his visits when Lamartine first presented himself at Villiers-sur-Orge; but behind the chair of Delphine he constantly observed one whom he describes as "a young man of slender but charming form, and of extremely youthful appearance. He spoke but little; he was not formally introduced; he seemed — like a brother or a relation — to live on intimate terms with the two ladies. This young man had his eyes constantly fixed on Delphine; he spoke to her in a low tone; she negligently turned

round her handsome face to reply to him, or to smile at him as he rested on the back of her chair. I asked her mother," continues Lamartine, "who was this young unknown, whose fine expressive countenance inspired involuntary attention and curiosity. The mother told me that it was M. Emile de Girardin . . . . and consulted me upon some vague ideas of marriage. I said to her that he had one of those countenances which pierce darkness and subdue dangers, and that in France, the land of intelligence, the richest fortune was youth, love, and talent. A short time afterwards, when I was away from France, I learnt that the vision of the Cascades of Terni had become a wife." Delphine Gay was married to M. Emile de Girardin in 1831.

This marriage was a subject of aston-

ishment to many of the bride's admirers; but now as then it were impertinent to speculate upon its causes, or to attempt to unveil her reasons for accepting M. de Girardin as a husband.

He paid the penalty for marrying such a celebrity, as thereby he provoked a host of enemies and detractors in her friends and flatterers. But Delphine herself objected to this. Her heart seems to have had its full share in her choice of a husband. For example: M. Emile de Girardin was not too rich in those days, but, anxious to do homage to his bride, he installed her in a magnificent abode. There, one of her husband's relatives paid Delphine his first visit after her marriage. He was a plain-spoken, blunt, old man, and finding her alone, but surrounded by all the glories of the

carver, the gilder, and the upholsterer, he looked first at her, then at the furniture, and, shrugging his shoulders, made a grimace.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Delphine, interpreting this grimace aright. "I have not asked for these things, sir; such frivolities can add nothing to my happiness, but Emile desired to have them. For me Emile and a garret would suffice."

"A garret!" cried the old gentleman, "a garret! Well, madame, you will have your wish, for all this finery will lead to that."

Balzac's "Physiologie du Mariage," had not been long published at the time of Delphine Gay's union with Emile de Girardin; and it is asserted that her husband did seriously and practically interpret the satirical advice of Balzac to mar-

ried men on the suppression of a wife's intellect, for "the tenth Muse" no longer wrote except to translate her husband's prose into poetry. "Prose of a newspaper journalist and politician!" Can it be wondered at that one of Delphine's countrymen and admirers thus apostrophises her: "It is all very well to adore your husband. M. de Girardin, indeed, deserves in all respects to be the object of so lively an attachment. Far from us be the heinous thought of blaming you in the least upon that point. . . . Nevertheless, France has the first claim upon you; you belonged to her before you belonged to the journalist. You are under no obligation to follow him into the thickets where he thrusts himself, and where, poor muse! you will tear the white robe which your sisters have given unto

you." In this speech there is even more acrimony against the "journalist" than admiration of "the Muse."

Emile de Girardin, desirous of finding a short cut to fortune, entered into certain then prevalent speculations on the Bourse, and soon afterwards Delphine once more took up her pen and wrote, "La Canne de M. de Balzac."

But was Delphine de Girardin shackled by restrictions which were unknown and unfelt by Delphine Gay, the poetess? It would seem so by the following preface to "The Walking-stick of M. de Balzac."

"Once upon a time there was in this romance ——"

"But it is not a romance."

"In this work ——"

"But it is not a work."

"In this book ——"

"Still less is it a book."

"In these pages, in short, there was once upon a time a rather *piquant* chapter, entitled,

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

"But somebody said to the author, 'Take care, this is personal, these personages will be recognised; do not publish this chapter.' And the docile author cut out the chapter. There was another chapter, entitled,

A DREAM OF LOVE.

"It was a rather tender scene of love, as a scene of passion in a romance ought to be. But somebody said to the author, 'It is not proper for you to publish a book in which passion plays so great a part; this chapter is not necessary; suppress it.' And the timid author cut out this second chapter. Once upon a

time, moreover, in these pages were two pieces of verse. The one was a satire;—the other an elegy. But somebody found the satire too biting, and the elegy too sad. . . The author has sacrificed them — but this conviction remains to her,—That a woman who lives in the world ought not to write at all, since she is not permitted to publish anything but what is perfectly insignificant."

Madame de Girardin had already formed a personal acquaintance with Balzac, to whom, through the fantastic medium of a magic walking-stick, she, in this book, attributes the power of looking into the hearts and souls of his fellow-creatures, and of rendering himself invisible (this *fantaisie* is, indeed, but another version of the gift of *Avater*, which, as we have seen, was attributed to him by his admiring

disciple, Théophile Gautier.) The manner and the matter of this work were suited to the taste of the Parisian public. And thus did the "tenth muse"—the future "COURRIER" of Paris journalism,—having now encountered some realities both sweet and stern of woman's life, begin to write prose; the truest poetry this, perhaps, inasmuch as it was the unconscious reflection of the poem which she lived.

Thus considered, more pathetic, even when most playful, was Madame de Girardin's prose than any poetry for which she had been crowned at the Capitol of Rome, and in the Panthéon of Paris; a new earnestness dawns in the title of one of her works at this time, "*Il ne faut pas jouer avec la douleur.*"

In an after chapter will be found that she had some reason, if not for grief, at all events, for regret.

Meanwhile, she and her husband no longer lived in their first residence; they had removed to an abode (in the Rue Laffitte) which they shared with Dujarrier, joint proprietor with M. de Girardin of the newspaper, "La Presse," of which the latter was chief editor. Madame de Girardin still continued to write. She had strength for tragedy, and feminine *finesse* for comedy, but she triumphed most in conversation. Her countenance was the most eloquent interpreter of her genius. An evening, declares one who often sat by her fireside,—an evening spent in her society was the best edition of all her works.

She, the improvisatrice of France, de-

sired but dreaded connubial literary co-operation, for her husband, as journalist, was called upon to fight with other weapons besides his pen. He was wounded in a duel; tenderly she nursed him; and then Delphine, appalled at the *mêlée* of blood and ink which the Revolution of 1830 had called forth, and finding herself in the midst of the whirlwind of passions which then abounded in political workshops, seems for one moment to have lost courage; but, reassured, she forthwith (in 1836) began, under the pseudonym of the "Vicomte de Launay," the "Lettres Parisiennes," which, incorporated as the "Courrier of Paris" in her husband's journal, helped (until 1848) to reform the tone of French society. In these letters there is scarcely a subject which she leaves untouched; but their

style is versatile; their sentiments are pure. As a complete publication, these letters are said and felt to be some of the most perfect pictures of society that have ever been portrayed by pen or pencil.

It is easy to imagine the sympathy that must necessarily have subsisted between the *spirituelle* author of these letters and Balzac, the satirist of their mutual time. In him Madame de Girardin had found a friend (here let nobody presume for the word *friend* to read *lover*), and in her, at length, he had found, in some sort, the woman, the consoler, of whom he had long dreamed,—the woman who could say to him from her heart, "Thou hast suffered much."

With reverence did Balzac approach Madame de Girardin. Her society was to

him a haven from the storms of life. In her he found the one who could comprehend the caprices of a soul fiercely tormented, not less than a look or a word however vague; who was happy in silence, happy in effusion; who could rise into the vast spheres of man's thought, or who could condescend like a child to the simple task of amusing him.

Although working as laboriously as ever through the night, and passing whole days in correcting his proofs with a conscientiousness and self-criticism so minute that he drove the printers of his works to the verge of distraction, Balzac was a frequent visitor at the house of Madame de Girardin. Her presence was an inspiration to him. Upon more than one occasion, his friend, Théophile Gautier, accompanied Balzac in these

visits, "And certainly," says he, "had a stranger entered, he would have wondered what could possibly be the object of our little assembly in Madame de Girardin's drawing-room; for we sat there in profound silence; that beautiful Delphine in a reverie twining her white and taper fingers in the long loose ringlets of her golden hair; and Balzac, dreaming also, seated on the elbow of the great arm-chair opposite to her; the muscles of his face were contracted as though by some extraordinary contention of the soul; but her countenance was calm and pensive. He would look at her, and find repose. Ah!" exclaims the looker-on, "what evenings those were—evenings that will return no more. Who could have foreseen that that tall and superb woman, who, when plunged in meditation, seemed

as though carved in pure antique marble; that that vigorous, vivacious, and strong man,—half Hercules, half Satyr,—would both soon sleep their last sleep, the one at Montmartre, and the other at Père-la-chaise!"

But, though now celebrated, Balzac, the Realist of Romance, was not even at this time of his life without outward and visible signs of the fierce struggle which for years, unknown and unseen by man, had gone on within him.

The sickness of hope long deferred had left its traces upon him. This is his portrait: "A superb head, black hair, prematurely tinged with white, like the hair of St. Paul or St. Peter in pictures, but shining and curling. . . . A throat round and white as that of a woman; a magnificent forehead, marked between

the eyebrows with that one powerful wrinkle which great projects, great thoughts, and strong meditations inscribe on the foreheads of great men; an olive complexion, but rosy, nostrils which dilate, eyes of fire, cheeks marked by two long lines ploughed by suffering. . . . a mouth which smiles, sardonically; black moustaches, and a chin well cut, but too short; the marks known as 'crow's feet' visible; eyes hollow, gleaming from beneath arched eyebrows like burning globes; but, notwithstanding all these indications of violent passions, an air generally calm and profoundly resigned; a voice of penetrating sweetness—the voice of a true orator—sometimes cold and crafty; sometimes insinuating, but upon occasion thundering, although in sarcasm, soft, and then most incisive. . . . . Of

middle height, neither fat nor thin, his hands like those of a prelate."

Such is Honoré de Balzac's portrait, painted by himself in "Albert Savarus," and authenticated by those who knew him personally. If this portrait provoke a smile by its egotism, let it be remembered that with Balzac his genius was his egotism; that he himself, by his gift of *Avater*, more than once alluded to, was the incarnation of all his own characters. He lived, he suffered, he rejoiced, he smiled, or he wept for the time with each successive creation of his own brain. But in none of his works, perhaps, is there so *much of himself* as in "La Peau de Chagrin."

From the date of the most popular edition of this publication, it is likely that he was passing through its stirring scenes

and was agonised by the fate of its hero (whom also he makes the medium of autobiographical sketches already translated in these pages) when, seated in presence of Madame de Girardin, the muscles of his face were contracted by the fierce conflict of his spirit. According to the instinct of each separate reader, this marvellous work has been variously considered as a whole; but who can say that the metaphor conveyed by its title is not a moral in itself?—"La Peau de Chagrin," "The Shagreen Skin," literally; but the word *Chagrin*, be it remembered, may also be translated as grief, vexation, sorrow. Upon this *double entendre* turns the tale of which a slight sketch, to be omitted by those who have already considered the work in itself, is here given.

A young author loves a woman who has neither the head to comprehend the true nature of his love, nor the heart to reciprocate it. Desirous of attracting this woman, by lowering himself to the level of her view of life, the young author, hitherto chaste and studious, forsakes the secluded path of his existence, and plunges into debt and dissipation. Convinced at last of her heartlessness, and finding himself in money difficulties, he seeks forgetfulness of the one and redemption from the other in gambling; he loses his last crown-piece at play, and, rushing forth from the table, is about to drown himself in the Seine, but by the side of the river he meets two beggars, an old man and a child.

Mechanically feeling in his pockets at sight of these beggars, the ruined man

unexpectedly finds three sous. He flings these to the beggars, who, in return for the sous, pray for the preservation of his life. The young man cannot drown himself in presence of witnesses; he walks away from the water, and presently finds himself in an old curiosity shop on the Quai above it.

Here, amongst many treasures of time and art, is a shagreen skin—which skin, the owner of the shop, a small, weird, old man, but great philosopher—declares to be not only fabulously ancient, but stamped with the seal of Solomon the king. The old man also affirms that to this skin belongs the magic power of granting to him who is voluntarily its owner, all that he wishes. The young man is sceptical, and a scholar. He mocks at the old man's statement, but, neverthe-

less, he closely scrutinises the shagreen skin, and then finds inscribed upon it in Oriental characters:—

"If thou dost possess me, thou wilt possess everything. But thy life will belong to me. It is thus decreed. Desire, and thy desires shall be fulfilled. But measure thy life by thy wishes. *It is there. At each wish fulfilled, I shall decrease as will thy days.* Wilt thou have me? Take. Omnipotence will regard thee. So be it."

Drowning men proverbially catch at straws and shadows. The young man, though still doubting, is tempted, and resolves to possess himself of this skin. The old man warns him, that, "*To will* burns us; *to be able* destroys us: these two verbs," says he, "conjugate life. But this," pointing to the skin, "is will and power united;

though what," asks he, "is madness itself, but an excess of either power or will?"

But the young man only says, "I wish to feel the full power of this life, —to drink its pleasures to the dregs, even though they kill me." And, seizing the skin, he carries it off with him. Suddenly the young man is transported into the midst of a voluptuous scene. That very night he begins to live and begins to die.

Henceforth his every desire is granted, but each time that his wishes are gratified the skin shrinks, and his strength decreases. Horribly, visibly, the skin shrinks; until at last its owner, terrified at its decreased dimensions, by which, according to the compact, he estimates the shrunken span of his own life, is afraid to think, to feel, or even by chance to say, "*I*

wish." Dreading desire of any sort, he secludes himself in his home, which is a palace, from every fresh sound, or sight, that may provoke it. But fate (or nature) is too strong for him. He falls in love.

Really, purely, fervently, he loves, as he had never loved before; and the young girl whom thus he loves and hopes to make his wife, knows nothing of the secret of his life, or the compact by which he has sold it. Thinking to escape from that compact, he flings the remainder of the skin away from him, deep down into a well of water, and brings the young girl home as his bride. But the skin finds its way back to him, by the hands of a gardener, who, in clearing out the well, has found it there, and it is now smaller than ever, having, though unseen, diminished rapidly since its owner's new life of love.

Desperately determined to elude his fate if possible, the young now man takes the skin to the great men of science then in Paris, that it may be expanded by their skill; but water will not swell it, nor fire cause it to stretch even by a hair's breadth. It still continues to shrink, visibly. At last seeing by its size, not larger than the palm of his hand, that not a span of life remains to him if continuing in presence of his love, the young man flies from home, leaving his bride, who is ignorant of the cause of his flight, disconsolate. But fate compels him to return to her, and then,—in one moment of concentrated emotion—he dies, and the spell vanishes from sight altogether.

Such is the canvas on which this curious tale is worked; but impossible is it here to convey an adequate idea of

the many complex threads that are closely interwoven on that canvas. As well try to catch all the tints of a rainbow, or to count all the fibres of a leaf held up against the sun, as to attempt to analyze any real tale of human passion. As author, Balzac was now famous; but, as a man in debt, he was decried by some defenders of Paris conscience. He resolved, therefore, to soothe, by an infallible balm, the sensitiveness of social opinion, which is "never in need of excuse for a million of money."

CHAPTER V.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC (*continued*).

Gold schemes—Dreams and tales of wealth—Journey to Sardinia—"Ring of the Prophet"—Conversation with Laurent Jan—Proposed journey to the Great Mogul—Furious Storm—Balzac's country house—Garden projects—Building experiment—Ideal furniture—Hospitality—Costume—Diet—Guests—Coffee—Tea—Rest—Labour—Nocturnal walks—Opium scheme—Power of fascination—Journalism—Arrest—Rescue—Literary conscientiousness—Boudoir *à la fille aux yeux d'or*—Study—Search for a name—"Marcas"—Preface to "Marcas."

Balzac was still in debt; and he began to rack his brain by schemes, which, though some of them provoke a smile, may prove, at least, that, to his imagination, there was nothing impossible.*

Balzac, as before said, always *lived* his characters; and to one of these (Facino Cane) he had given the instinct of gold-

* In his comedy of "Mercadet," Balzac insinuates, in a confab amongst the domestics of a master in pecuniary difficulties, that Debt stimulates the fancy even of a *femme de chambre*. Mademoiselle Virginie, who had opened the door besieged by debt, explains: "Sometimes one must gaze at a creditor with wonder, as though he had fallen down from the moon, and then say: 'Why, sir, don't you know? No? . . . Not know that Monsieur Mercadet has started for Lyon! Ah, he has gone! Yes, for a

finding. Henceforth he dreamed of hidden treasures that he was to find for himself, of gold and precious stones which, lying under the earth, only awaited the power of his will to reveal them. "Modern life," said he, who naïvely thought to write its universal history, "is governed by money;" and once having digested this fact, Balzac, almost always, be it observed, either endows the men and women he creates with money, or, making them destitute, he probes the sympathy of his readers by their want of it.

One day, in 1833, he was reading that

superb affair; he has discovered coal-mines . . .' And sometimes one must shed tears and sigh, 'Alas! Poor Madame Mercadet! She is ill! Poor master! he has taken my mistress to the waters. Oh! . . . ' But then, there are some creditors so coarse! Bah! Why they positively *dare* to speak to *us* as though *we* were masters!"

the Romans had formerly worked silver-mines in Sardinia, and had abandoned them long before they were exhausted. "In that case," reasoned Balzac, "the silver must be there still;" and striking his hand upon his forehead, he cried out aloud, "Eureka! I am a millionnaire." Without delay Balzac borrowed five hundred francs, went straight to Marseilles, and embarked for Sardinia on board a Genoese vessel, to the captain of which he imparted the purpose of his voyage,—that of examining for himself the site of these silver-mines. In consequence of his investigation, Balzac was convinced that by reopening and working them, his dream of wealth would be speedily realised. In high spirits he returned to Paris, bringing with him a sample of mineral earth, which, upon being tested, was found to contain silver. He

then applied to the Sardinian Government for authority to excavate the site; but the answer was that he was too late; for the captain of the Genoese vessel had been beforehand with him; and, cunningly acting on Balzac's suggestions, had solicited the above-named authorization, which was granted to him.

His imagination being illimitable, Balzac was credulous. It has been said that in every man of genius there dwells a little child, and this truth was evidenced by the ease with which this great genius was sometimes duped. In proof of this, the following anecdote.

One winter's night, Balzac's friend and *confrère*, Laurent Jan, was awakened by a violent knocking at the outer door of the house where he lodged.

"What do you want? Who are you?"

he heard the housekeeper screaming out in alarm from below, and tramp—tramp—a step that sounded familiar to him—ascended to his own door, which was unlocked. Hardly certain whether or not he were dreaming Jan sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes, when who should stand before him at the foot of his bed but Balzac! Much alarmed at this unexpected apparition, "Is it really thyself?" asked Jan.

"Myself," responded Balzac. "Rise. Let us start on our journey!"

"Start on our journey!" echoed Jan. "Whither?"

"Yes, start—start at once—but get up—lose no time—I will explain whilst you dress," said Balzac.

"No," said Jan, recovering his courage, "I will not rise until I know where I am going."

"Well, rejoice then," answered Balzac; "we are about to set out instantly to visit the Mogul."

"Are you mad?" asked Jan.

"We are about to be immensely rich," continued Balzac, "rich as an empire, as the empire of the Mogul."

"But," Jan ventured timidly to suggest, "before packing my portmanteau, I should like to know the object of our journey to the Mogul at this untimely hour."

"Make haste!" cried Balzac, "we have already lost a million of money by this parleying; time is getting on, and we have still to go and seek Gozlan,* for I would that he share with us the treasure of the Great Mogul."

Jan, shivering, got out of his warm

* Léon Gozlan, who, after tropical travel, had returned to France, where he became the literary disciple of Balzac. Of Gozlan, who authenticates the above anecdote, we shall see and know more presently.

bed, and, with a sort of grumbling resignation at becoming a millionnaire, began to dress himself. His toilette hastily completed, he turned once more to Balzac, who was stamping with impatience, and said, "But if I consent to follow you to the empire of the Mogul, I must know what we are to do when we get there."

In answer to this question, Balzac took hold of Laurent Jan by the arm, mysteriously, and leading him towards the lamp :—

"Look at this ring," said he, pointing to one on his finger.

"Well, I see it," said Jan, "it is worth about four sous."

"Silence! Look again," commanded Balzac, drawing it off, and holding it close to the light for Jan's inspection.

"Well then, six sous," said Jan; "but what matters this ring or its value?"

Balzac drew backward a step; and, speaking solemnly, "Know," said he, "that this ring was given to me at Vienna,* by the famous historian Von Hammer."

"Well?" inquired Jan.

"Well," continued Balzac, "and in giving it to me the famous historian smiled and said, 'Some day you will know the importance of the little present I now make you.' I wore this ring without thinking of these words, without reflecting that of all green stones this . . . ."

* Balzac made frequent journeys to various parts of Europe. If he wanted to describe any place, or even the minutest object of any place, in his works, he travelled to the place itself for the purpose of personal observation. It is generally allowed in France, amongst his confraternity there, that in such respects Balzac was the most conscientious author that ever lived.

"Well?" again interposed Jan.

"Well," resumed Balzac, "in the first place there are Arabian characters engraven on this stone; these characters . . . But let us not anticipate the immense surprise which awaited me yesterday, nor the treasures which, resulting from it, I desire to participate with you . . . Yesterday then, at the soirée of the Ambassador of Naples, I resolved to ask the Ambassador of the Ottoman Porte the meaning of these characters. I show the ring to him, and the Turk has scarcely set eyes upon it than he utters a cry which is heard by the whole assembly, and brings many witnesses round us. 'You have there,' says he, bowing himself down to the ground, 'you have there that which comes from the Prophet; it has been worn by the Prophet, and the name

of the Prophet is inscribed upon it. That ring was stolen by the English from the Great Mogul about a hundred years since, and afterwards it was sold to a German Prince.' I interrupt him: 'It was given to me at Vienna by Von Hammer,' say I. 'Go,' resumes the Ambassador, 'go into the empire of the Great Mogul, for he has offered tons of gold and of diamonds to whoever should restore to him the ring of the Prophet, and you will return—with tons?' Oh! my dear Jan, only fancy how my heart leapt with joy! And I come to fetch you that, together with Gozlan, we may go and restore to the Great Mogul, ravished with ecstasy to the third heaven, the ring of the Prophet. Come! The tons of gold and diamonds await us!"

"And for this," replied Jan, coldly,

"thou hast disturbed me in the middle of the night!"

"And art thou not sufficiently rewarded?" asked Balzac, still contemplating his magic ring with reverence.

"I adhere," answered Jan, "to the offer that I made you, I will give you four sous for thy ring of the Prophet."

And Jan undressed himself, and returned to his bed.

Balzac was furious. "Of a sanguine and bilious temperament," says Gozlan, "which gives something of the aspect of a lion to him when he is in a rage, Balzac fulminated against Laurent Jan; but at length, exhausted by passion, he stretched himself on the hearth-rug, and slept until morning, dreaming of the treasures of the Great Mogul. It was thus that Jan and I escaped from the great journey to the

empire of the Mogul, which still awaits us. Balzac spoke but seldom afterwards of the ring of the Prophet, and then only with much circumspection. Henceforth, it was not often seen upon his fingers."

Amongst other schemes to enrich himself by a *coup-de-main*, Balzac turned journalist. "Create a newspaper, a review," said his friends to him. "Your name only will conjure up a host of subscribers."

But his genius and his generosity were equally opposed to him as a journalist. He did not succeed. He was morbid in self-criticism as an author; but, instead of criticizing his contributors, he gave them champagne. Is this the way for an editor to make a newspaper pay him well? "The Feuilleton littéraire," the "Revue Parisienne," and the "Chronique de Paris,"

though all more or less rich in good writing, each only helped successively to impoverish Balzac.

Nevertheless, every fresh romance that fell from his pen was eagerly caught up by the public. He worked constantly; not even a new gold dream had power to suspend his labour. His income, derived from the sale and circulation of his works in every country in Europe, must now have been considerable; but, as we have seen, he was already in debt, when, after long years of toil and disappointment, he at last, achieved fame, and since then his endeavours to accelerate fortune by speculation had involved him still more deeply.

It was with the hope of making money that he bought the little estate, known as *Les Jardies*, on the road from Sèvres

to Ville d' Avray. Here he intended to plant vines, to force five hundred feet of pine-apples, &c. The pine-apples were to be sold for five francs each instead of a louis — which was their general price at that time—and Balzac calculated on realising five hundred thousand francs from his forcing-beds.

A shop was to be rented on the Boulevard Montmartre for the exclusive sale of "PINE-APPLES FROM THE JARDIES:" but all these plans failed.

The outlay was certain, and the returns precarious, as must always be the case with amateur undertakings. But having bought this little estate, Balzac lived at it a great part of his time. It was here that he received his brother authors; it was here that he wrote his "Médecin de Campagne," and other works.

It was here that he built a house, or rather a curious pavilion, on an original plan of his own. This house was musical with bells hung on scientific principles, but which there were no servants to answer when rung. Balzac had been his own architect in the construction of this abode, and rejoiced in the compartments he had devised; spacious, airy, and square, were these rooms, and commanded a view of the country from either side; but — so the story goes — he had forgotten the staircase.

"M. de Balzac," said the masons, "your house is finished; but when do you wish us to make the staircase; and where?"

The dilemma was awkward; the necessity extreme. Vexed by the "asperities of the problem," Balzac cried out at

last, "Since the staircase is inclined to master me in my own house, I will turn it out-of-doors:" which he did. It was built outside the house against the outer wall.

The Jardies became an object of public curiosity. Many travelled from Paris by the railway to Ville. d' Avray, only to look at the outside of Balzac's Folly!

There it was, perched up on steep and slippery ground. The shutters were green; and truly the house needed shade, for only one tree was near it, and that tree was a huge walnut-tree — of historical local celebrity, as will presently appear.

For some years the inside of this abode was furnished only by Balzac's imagination, as thus explained by Léon Gozlan, his frequent visitor there:—

"Upon the bare stucco walls of each

empty room, sentences, such as the following, were inscribed in charcoal:—

"'Here, an adornment in pure Paros marble.'

"'Here, a pedestal in cedar-wood.'

"'Here, a ceiling painted by Eugène Delacroix.'

"'Here, a carpet of Aubusson.'

"'Here, a mantel-piece of chiselled marble.'

"'Here, doors like those of Trianon.

"'Here, a mosaic inlaid floor, formed of all the rare woods of the isles.'

"'Balzac not only allowed jesting upon this ideal furniture, but he laughed even more than I did one day, when, in characters still larger than his, I wrote upon the wall of his own room, which was as empty as the other rooms,

"'HERE, A PICTURE BY RAPHAEL, BE-

YOND ALL PRICE, AND SUCH AS NEVER HAS YET BEEN SEEN."

The same guest, whilst rendering testimony to Balzac's hospitality, declares that the host himself drank nothing but water, and ate little meat, but that he consumed a quantity of fruit. "It was in one of the lower compartments of the *Jardies* that we dined at six o'clock; although Balzac himself sometimes did not join us until dessert, but he was superb in vegetarian *pantagruélisme.*

"Dressed in his ordinary costume at home (*i.e.* a white cachemire or flannel robe), his cravat off, his shirt open, it was a sight to see him, fruit-knife in hand, cutting into the pulp of a pear, laughing, drinking water, and I would add, *talking;* but Balzac talked little at table. He let others talk; he laughed from time to time

quietly, or else burst forth like a bomb if any saying pleased him. Then, his chest inflated, his shoulders danced, and it seemed as though Rabelais himself were before us.

"Wine was drunk freely at Balzac's table, often too freely. I shall never forget a celebrated Russian, who from midnight until two in the morning shed hot tears over the melancholy fate of one of his friends who was condemned to pass the remainder of his days at Tobolsk, in the depths of Siberia. The Russian's grief for this excellent friend was so infectious, that we all began to weep without very well knowing why. This exile was working in the mines, and the more we drank the deeper descended the unfortunate creature into the bowels of the earth; until at last, at two o'clock in the morning,

he was so plunged into bitumen, sulphur, mercury, and platina, that we lost sight of him altogether. Some days afterwards, Balzac informed us that this celebrated Russian had no friend at all at Tobolsk; and that he had since confessed this to him. We had all been duped by Rhenish wine . . . Around that table have I seen celebrities of all sorts, the most brilliant and the gloomiest . . . . After dinner, we generally went out to take coffee on the terrace; Balzac's coffee deserves to be proverbial. I don't believe that of Voltaire could have dared to rival it.

"What colour! what fragrance! He made it himself, or at least he always presided over its decoction. Decoction learned, subtile, sublime, peculiar to him as was his genius.

"Balzac's coffee was, in my opinion, the

best and most exquisite of things, only second best to his tea.

"This tea, fine as Latakieh snuff, yellow as Venetian gold, was never given to the profane. It was necessary to submit to a species of initiation before enjoying the right to taste it. It was kept in a Kamschatdale box, like a relic; and enveloped in silken paper covered with hieroglyphics. Whilst unfolding the paper which contained it, Balzac always began to tell the history (which, though often heard, was always a new pleasure to him and to us) of this famous tea of gold. The sun did not ripen it, except for the Emperor of China. First-class Mandarins were appointed, by a privilege of birth, to water it and to nurture it when growing. Young girls, virgins, gathered it before sunrise; and singing, carried it to the feet of the

Emperor of China. This enchanted tea was only produced in one sacred province in China; and this sacred province only supplied a few pounds of it for the use of his Imperial Majesty and the eldest sons of his august house. By special grace, the Emperor of China, on his gift-days, sent some rare handfuls of it to the Emperor of Russia. It was from the minister of that autocrat, that Balzac, through the medium of the ambassador, had obtained that with which he now favoured us. (The last quantity of this golden tea had been given to him by Von Humboldt.)

"Rarely did Balzac pass the whole evening with his guests. Never, if pressed hard by work.

"Immediately after dessert, he said adieu to us, and went to bed. More than

once I have seen him at seven o'clock, in the midst of the soft splendour of a summer evening, leave us out-of-doors, and thoughtfully remount the ascent to the house, that he might snatch by main force, as it were, an unwholesome sleep, so as to be able to rise at midnight and write or compile until the next day.

"Such was his life, the life of a galley-slave; a life atrocious, against nature. Murderous efforts! Without these efforts, however, I do not believe it possible," continues Gozlan, "for the pen to dig a deep furrow in the sides of the hard mountain of fame—at the foot of which mountain is also the tomb of the writer.

"Nobody in the world, perhaps, has lived so much in the night as Balzac. That great silence of life, and of nature, restored to him the calm essential to the

creation of his finest works. It was when walking through the solitary woods of Ville d'Avray and those of Versailles, that he thought and compiled.

"He has told me that in the morning he has often found himself with bare head, and in dressing-gown and slippers on the Place du Carrousel, after having walked all night, through woods, plains, meadows, and roads. He would then climb upon the top of a public conveyance to Versailles, and re-enter Ville d'Avray through Sèvres; having only forgotten to pay the coachman, from the very simple reason that he had gone out from the *Jardies* without a sou in his pocket; this surprised nobody; all the public coachmen knew him; and he, Balzac, had amongst other original habits, that of never carrying money upon him.

Neither, it is true, did he ever wear a watch."

Thus far Léon Gozlan. Another of Balzac's contemporaries and literary colleagues, tells us that his last unrealised gold scheme was to go to Corsica to cultivate opium there. All these wild plans were so carefully elaborated by Balzac, and the conviction with which he advocated them was so forcible, that his hearers dreaded that in listening to him they would be carried away by his illusions. One day, for example, when Balzac was expatiating on the advantages to be derived from his Corsican opium speculation, Dutacq, his guest and hearer, rushed out from the Jardies, crying, "If I stay he will make me as mad as himself." And others of his confraternity, including Gérard de Nerval, Laurent Jan,

and the Marquis de Belloy, tell various anecdotes to prove how marvellous was the fascination which Balzac exercised over those who were in his company. There were many who, for this reason, could not work as journalists with, or under him.

His imagination carried one out of one's depths, say they, he terrified one. "He made one dizzy. He was not a man, but an ocean."*

* Balzac's editorial generosity, as before said, was extreme. To secure the pen of Charles de Bernard (author of "La Rose Jaune," "La Femme de quarante ans," &c.), he paid three thousand francs owing by that author to another journalist. And to acquit himself of his own debt to the former proprietor of the "Chronique," he toiled incessantly. Indulgent to others, he was self-pitiless. But, failing in his editorial schemes, Balzac was at last in danger of bodily arrest for debt. By a woman he was betrayed. By a woman he was saved. For three weeks the bailiffs had sought, and could not find him. But at length a woman to whose charms the advocate of

I return to the Jardies. At a later date was removed to that pavilion, the fine library which de Balzac had accumulated at his residence at Chaillot in the Rue des Batailles. At this last-named abode he had fitted up a boudoir precisely as described by him in one of his works, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*. Not content with living his characters, he surrounded himself as far as possible with the same objects by which they were surrounded. From

her sex had been insensible, went to his creditor and said: "Monsieur, you have instituted a search for M. de Balzac. It is to my interest that he be carried off to prison, and therefore do I here inform you that he is now on a visit to Madame Visconti at her hôtel in the Champs Elysées." Two hours afterwards, just as Balzac was "in the midst of a chapter of romance," two bailiffs entered, and told him that a hackney coach awaited his convenience. But Madame de Visconti, outraged by this intrusion on her guest, flung the five thousand francs at the bailiffs, and pointed to the door. Balzac was at liberty.

the centre of the glitteringly white ceiling in the boudoir just mentioned, "was suspended à heavy silver-gilt lustre, and the cornice of the room was also silver-gilt. The carpet resembled an Oriental shawl, worked by the hands of slaves: it displayed the designs and recalled the poetry of Persia. The furniture was covered with white cachemire relieved by black and scarlet. The clock, the candelabra, were made of white marble and gold. Elegant flower-baskets contained red and white roses." There was an immense divan in the centre of this room, which divan, like the window curtains, was white and rose (*couleur amoureuse*); and upon the only table in the room stood a magnificent inkstand in malachite and gold, which, possibly, had come from Russia with the Imperial tea, from which it was easy to de-

coct scandal by those excluded from drinking it.

Théophile Gautier speaks of the childish satisfaction with which Balzac showed this boudoir to him; and describes him as afterwards touching the spring of a secret door which opened from it, and leading him into a nook in which stood only a narrow iron bedstead and a writing-table. This nook, as may be surmised, was Balzac's study, wherein he secured himself from all interruption. But, for the purpose of ascertaining to a nicety how far the sound of a human voice raised in a cry of distress (just then to be uttered by one of his heroines), could penetrate through a padded wall, he had caused the partition betwixt the boudoir and his study to be covered with wadding, linen, and paper in thick layers, the sight of which

much surprised Gautier, until he remembered that Balzac was wont to test by minutest personal experience the truth of his own descriptions. In this fact lies the impossibility for shallow flippancy to rival, or even to imitate, this Master of Realism; who, untiring, indefatigable, and of acute artistic conscience, would endure the most laborious fatigue in search of an especial tree, or flower, or herb, or stone, or blade of grass.

The following anecdote is offered in proof of this great author's patience and perseverance in all that regarded his vocation.

Balzac was writing a little tale which was coming out in the "Revue Parisienne," when his disciple Léon Gozlan met him about three o'clock one cold, drizzling, autumn day, in the Champs Elysées. Balzac was

in search of a name for one of his characters in this tale, whom he describes as living the agitated life of a man of genius, worked by other men who have no talent but for intrigue; this man of genius dies after many agonies, overwhelmed by the heavy sense of the deception he had met with in life, even more than he is overcome by poverty and by hunger, to both of which he is a martyr.

"And I want you to help me," says Balzac to Gozlan, "to find a name for this man—a name proportional to his destiny. This name does not come to me. I have demanded it from all imaginable vocal combinations, but without success. . . . I dread a name which does not adhere closely to its owner, like the gum to the tooth, the hair to the root, the nail to the flesh . . . . I dread a name

which responds not to its owner's character, to his face, to his figure, to his future, to his genius, to his tastes, to his passions, to his woes, to his glory. Have you such a name for my hero?"

"No," answers Gozlan, "but let us make up one together."

"Impossible!" answers Balzac. "Have I not told you that I have tried to do so? Moreover, my conviction, after a thousand wearisome attempts, is that a name is no more to be *made* than is granite, or flint, or pit-coal, or marble, to be made. A name is the work of time, of revolutions, of I know not what. . . . A name no more creates itself than does a language."

"Then," says Gozlan, "we have no resource but to discover a name already made."

"Exactly," eagerly assents Balzac.

"If it exist," amends Gozlan.

"It does exist," affirms Balzac, solemnly.

"Where?" asks Gozlan.

"That is just what I want you to help me to find out," says Balzac.

Consulting together how to set about this, they agree by the time they have reached the Rue of the Coq St. Honoré, near the Louvre, to look up at all the signs and names above the shop-doors of Paris for inspiration.

"Let us begin here," says Balzac, finding himself in the street above named, and therefore in some sort under the protection of his patron saint. And they do begin.

Many in those days were the signs in the Rue du Coq St. Honoré. Signs above the windows of the houses, and

signs below the windows; signs over the street-doors; signs on the door-posts; signs at the corners of the street; and names in proportion to the signs. Every trade has its sign (as everybody knows who remembers Paris in those days), and every sign has the name of its owner, be he or she hosier, basket-maker, butcher, baker, dentist, or midwife, &c.; but no sign, no name, is to be found in the Rue du Coq St. Honoré which was appropriate to Balzac's hero.

Balzac walks on one side of the street, Gozlan walks on the other side, their noses up in the air, running up sometimes against foot-passengers, or stopping short to contemplate a sign, or to reflect upon a name blazoned forth on the walls of the street, or upon the fronts of the houses.

Emerging from the Rue du Coq St.

Honoré, they walk, or rather stumble on, through innumerable streets, with no result. Round through by-streets, to the Rue St. Honoré, the great public thoroughfare of Paris; to the Palais Royal, then to the Rue Vivienne, to the Place de la Bourse, to the Rue Neuve Vivienne, to the Boulevard Montmartre, and so on; until at last, at the corner of the Rue Montmartre, Gozlan pulls up, thoroughly tired, and declares that he will not go a step further.

"Ah!" says Balzac. "Always, and in all places, it is ever the same story of Christopher Columbus forsaken by his crew. But, go! I will reach the shores of America alone. Leave me!".

"But," remonstrates Gozlan, "you are surrounded by Americas, only you will not alight upon one. You reject

every name. You are unjust. Here are some superb names of German brokers, of Hungarian bootmakers, of Westphalian shoemakers, and a thousand other names full of expression. You desire the impossible."

"There is as little cause for weariness as for anger," answers Balzac. "Come, lean upon my arm, and yield to me as far as Saint Eustache, for did not his crew grant three days' grace to Columbus?"

"But only as far as Saint Eustache," bargains Gozlan.

"So be it," says Balzac.

Again they set forth; but Saint Eustache, according to Balzac, was uncircumscribed. Up and down streets of various length, and breadth, and height, and depth, they go; Gozlan grumbling, but still me-

chanically looking up at the houses; Balzac in profound contemplation, as it seems, of every name he sees, and only answering Gozlan's murmurs by now and then repeating to himself some name, going over every syllable of it carefully in a way that would have alarmed its owner had he been behind him, and then rejecting it with a mournful shake of his head.

At last, Gozlan determines to bear this no longer; he is scarcely able to put one foot before the other on the ill-paved *quartier* which they have now reached. But, suddenly, he feels Balzac's arm quiver with strong emotion as he leans upon it. (They have reached the corner of a miserable street, the Rue Coq Héron.) Gozlan looks up; before them is an ugly corner house, but outside it no sign of

a trade at all, nor any particular name as far as Gozlan can see. But Balzac has stopped. Gozlan turns his eyes from the house before them to his companion's face, and beholds it lighted up with ecstasy.

"There! there! there!" Balzac cries. "Read! read! read!"

And aloud Gozlan does read above the wretched little door of the house before them,—"MARCAS."

"Ah! MARCAS!" echoes Balzac, his voice trembling with emotion. "What say you to that? Marcas!" he repeats: "Ah! what a name! MARCAS!"

"I really don't see anything in this name," begins Gozlan.

"Hold your tongue!" commands Balzac. "It is the name of names. I seek no other. MARCAS!"

"I am glad you are satisfied," says Gozlan, dryly.

"Marcas!" goes on Balzac, without heeding Gozlan. "My hero shall be named *Marcas*. In *Marcas* is united the philosopher, the writer, the great politician, the poet unappreciated. All are in that name. MARCAS!"

"But if," says Gozlan, "the name of *Marcas* in your opinion proclaims all these things, he who in the house before us at this moment really possesses this name ought to be a rare specimen of the human race."

Without heeding this, "MARCAS!" continues Balzac, "I will call him Z. Marcas, that I may prefix to his name a flame, a star; Z. Marcas is, assuredly, a great artiste, an engraver, a chiseller, a goldsmith, like Benvenuto Cellini."

"You fly high," says Gozlan.

"With a name like that, one can never fly too high," says Balzac.

"That," says Gozlan, "is what we will now put to the test. I will run over the way and find out the profession of Monsieur Z. Marcas."

"Yes, go," says Balzac, standing, meanwhile, in adoration of the name.

Gozlan enters the house through an open door. A shop, but nobody in it. Presently an old woman in charge of the house comes forward, and from her Gozlan learns what he wants to know.

Coming out again, "TAILOR!" cries he, aloud, from across the street.

Balzac's head droops, but in a moment he proudly rears it again.

"He deserved a better fate," says he,

"But no matter! *I* will immortalise him. That is *my* business."

Gozlan went home with Balzac to the Jardies, and that very night MARCAS was immortalised, for then did Balzac write this preface to the tale:—

"There existed a certain harmony between the chief character in this work and his name. This Z, which precedes *Marcas*,—this initial which was always superscribed on every letter he received, and invariably prefixed to his signature, that last letter of the alphabet, gave an idea of fatality.

"'MARCAS!' repeat to yourself this name of two syllables; do you not find a sinister significance in it? Does it not seem to you that it portends martyrdom to its owner? Though strange and savage

in sound, this name has, nevertheless, the right to go down to posterity. Is it well formed? it pronounces easily; it has that brevity which is desirable for celebrated names. Is it not as sweet as it is eccentric? Also, does it not seem to you unfinished? I would not take upon myself to affirm that names exercise no influence on destiny. . . . Do you not see in the construction of the letter Z a contradictory way of dealing? Does it not form the twisted and odd zigzag of a tormented life? What ill wind has blown upon this letter that in each language which admits it, it commands scarcely fifty words?

"Examine this name again, Z. MARCAS! The whole life of the man is in the fantastic assemblage of these seven letters. Seven! The most significant of cabalistic

numbers. The man in this tale dies at thirty-five years of age; thus, his life has been composed of seven periods of five years. MARCAS! does not that name convey the idea of some precious thing which, with or without a crash, is broken by a fall?"

There was another great author in France, who at this time showed by her adoption of a *nom de plume*, that Balzac was not alone in his belief that certain names exercise certain influences on certain destinies. This author was Madame Dudevant; her *nom de plume*, George Sand.

How it was that she, (whose life, as woman, was a commentary on some of Balzac's writings, and who, as a writer herself, became the leader of a new school,

harmonizing and yet opposed to that of Balzac), came to adopt the name of George Sand, may be seen in the following sketch of her life, with which the continuation of Balzac's biography, and that of other contemporaries, will, in these ensuing pages, be interwoven.

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DUDEVANT (GEORGE SAND).

Birth — Ancestors — Parents — Childhood — Sorrow — First impressions — Deschartres — Life at Nohant — Life in the convent — Religious enthusiasm — Death — Inheritance — Mother — Confession — Marriage — Home — Retreat — Children — Domestic life — Journey to the Pyrenees — First lover — Dignity — Return home — First literary attempts — Domestic distrust — Literary Guest — Friend 'the Malgache' — Portrait of 'the Malgache' — Sketch of his previous life — Walks, and talks, and studies with 'the Malgache' — A wandering Petrarch — A household Laura — Home, outraged — Separation — Flight — Times (political) — Spiritual conflicts — Nun's prophecy — Life in front of the Morgue — Occupation — Literary beginnings — Adoption of male costume — Adventure at the theatre — Life at Nohant — Death in Paris.

Amantine Lucile Aurore Dudevant (née Dupin), now known to the whole world as George Sand, was born in the year 1804.

She is descended, on her father's side, from Frederic Augustus, king of Poland,—that "man of sin," who drove priest-ridden king Stanislas, "the benevolent philosopher," from the throne, and demoralized Frederick of Prussia, surnamed "the Great."

King Augustus was the father of the brave soldier of fortune, Maurice de Saxe, by the lovely Aurora, Countess von Kœnigsmark.

Maurice de Saxe, the hero of Fon-

tenoy, was the father, by a celebrated actress, of a daughter, named *Marie-Aurore*, who, at fifteen years of age, was married to Count de Horn, an illegitimate son of Louis XV., and governor of the province of Schelestadt. The Count was killed in a duel, and his widow, the daughter of Maurice Saxe, then married M. Dupin, a farmer-general of finance, and became the mother of a son, Maurice, the father of the future '*George Sand.*'

Of Madame George Sand, we shall, henceforth, during her childhood, speak only as *Aurore*, that third baptismal name by which, in the first dawn of her existence, she was known and loved.

The pedigree of Aurore's mother would not be so easy to trace as that of her father; but as she herself disdains the flattery which alludes to her only as of

royal descent, it may here be declared, in her own words, that her mother was a poor child of the old pavement of Paris, whose father, Antoine Delaborde, was a birdseller upon the Quai aux Oiseaux.

This poor child of the *pavé* saw strange sights in the streets of Paris during the last troubled days of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette; and she herself, in after years, remembered how she was elected to be one of a group of young goddesses who appeared in some popular festival at the Hôtel de Ville during that period preceding the "Age of Reason," when "beauty without modesty was seen usurping the place of the Holy of holies."

This birdseller's daughter had other personal remembrances, more or less indistinct, of the time of regicide and revolution, and the consequences of that time

to her — a time of terror. But, as a daughter of the people, she was one who hailed Napoléon I. as a deliverer from many evils; and thus prepared to welcome the chief, who can wonder that, when afterwards wooed by one of his brave young followers, she was not only won, but that she fell down and worshipped?

Her lover was Maurice, son of the aforesaid Madame Dupin, Countess Horn, and therefore the grandson of Maurice Saxe, and the great-grandson of royalty and beauty. He had been tenderly reared by his mother, who (a second time a widow) placed in him her every hope for time, if not for eternity. In her love for this only son was concentrated the whole faith of Madame Dupin; she was a lady of the *ancien régime;* she had, in her youth, been one of the demoiselles

de Saint Cyr. She was by nature calm and passionless; she had been the bride of a provincial viceroy, whose chamber she had never entered but to behold him a corpse (he was, as before said, killed in a duel, not long after their marriage), and, as his widow, she had, under royal patronage, corresponded with Voltaire concerning the comparative destitution in which she, the daughter of Maurice de Saxe, then found herself. Subsequently she had married M. Dupin, a rich man, old enough to be her father; but not until her one child was born did her heart throb in response to any thrilling touch of nature's tenderness.

Nevertheless, she had wept herself sick over the sorrows of the "Nouvelle Héloïse;" and, when her indulgent husband, who was an old friend and patron

of Rousseau, presented the author to her, she was so overcome with emotion, that she could scarcely speak, or ask Jean Jacques to eat.

She was, moreover, a lady of science, and a student of osteology. In her ribbon drawer, she kept the hand of a skeleton. She meditated deeply on the philosophy then in vogue. She delighted in the "Contract Social," she repudiated all superstitions; but, although dispensing with some of the creeds which had once been taught her by rote at Saint Cyr, she still held fast to the etiquette of her early training, and to the conventions of courtly life.

During the Revolution, she, as a suspected Royalist, had encountered some rather sharp vicissitudes; but, for these

and all other trials, she had sought and found consolation in her son.

Desirous that he should be educated, as far as possible, beneath her own eye, she had a tutor for him beneath her own roof. This tutor, named Deschartres, had formerly been an abbé, but, during the Revolution, he was known as "citizen," and, being learned in other things besides Greek and Latin, he in time became physician-in-chief to the peasantry and tenantry of the estate, upon which he resided with his pupil and his pupil's mother, Madame la Comtesse Horn Dupin.

This estate, called Château de Nohant, is situated in one of the most lovely vales of Berry; there it was that the Countess, after her son had enrolled himself as a soldier of the Republic, waited in anxiety

for tidings of him; and from thence she watched the career of the conqueror Buonaparte, with an intensity of interest which, as the mother of an Imperial soldier, eventually overcame in her, politically, the prejudices of her youth.

Politically, but not personally; for when she was informed of her son's marriage with a child of the *pavé*—the bird-seller's daughter—she was overwhelmed with horror, and indignation, and astonishment, because she had not calculated, with all her wisdom as a woman, and all her love as a mother, on causes and effects.

"Ah! my mother!" had written her son to her,—the daughter of Maurice de Saxe, hero of Fontenoy—"Ah! my mother! who could have foretold to thy friends, the philosophers, that their Ideas would one day make of me, the son of a finan-

cier, a soldier in the service of a republic, and that those ideas would be at the point of our sabres ?"

But, in the heart of this young republican soldier there was something which owned a higher origin than the blood of royalty or courage ; something there was in his nature as a man which rose superior to the royalty which had dishonoured Beauty by even making it the mother of Courage ; something which proved the shallowness of republican philosophy ; something which, though not educated to acknowledge God in creeds, still manifested, at a time of public anarchy and immorality, that in a man, true to his own best instincts, there is divinity.

In the birdseller's daughter, Maurice Dupin had learned the full force of a woman's single-hearted devotion. She

loved him with the fervour of an untrained but impassioned nature, with a truth which triumphed over all the disadvantages of her previous life, and with the constancy of a martyr. She was about to become a mother. True it was that illegitimacy was prevalent in those days of sacrilege; but the grandson of Maurice de Saxe, and of Aurore Von Kœnigsmark, now determined that the child about to be given to him by a woman, who truly loved him, should not be branded by the mark of social dishonour.

So his mother, the Countess, not only received the news that her only son was married to a daughter of the people, but that she was the grandmother of a babe, who, as a third baptismal name, was called after herself—*Aurore*.

The lady of the old *régime* did not

at first hear this news from her son himself. He was very brave, but he had not courage to pain his mother by shocking her prejudices. Six weeks he stayed with her at Nohant without finding speech by which to convey to her that he now owned other ties and duties than those belonging to him as her son; but, somehow, the secret at length oozed out; and, reaching his mother's ears, she wrote, upon his return to Paris (November, 1804) to the Mayor of a certain *Arrondissement* to obtain for her all information relative to the suspected marriage of her son and the birth of his infant daughter.

But, even when the fact was proved to her indubitably, she made no sign to her son either of knowledge, or anger, or pardon.

Nevertheless, when Maurice Dupin's

child had been born, his words, which welcomed her, proclaimed also his tender regard for his own mother; "She shall be named *Aurore*," said he, "after my mother, who is not here to bless her."

Before very long, however, he heard that his mother was in Paris; discovering, also, that his secret had become known to her, and suspecting that her present journey was for the purpose of attempting to invalidate his marriage, he took his little daughter in his arms, drove in a hackney coach to the house where the Countess was staying, and there he bade the gate portress carry the child upstairs into her presence.

The portress, with the quick scent of a Parisian for any little *ruse* of this sort, willingly entered into the scheme;

and making some excuse for the intrusion into Madame's apartment, there (in the course of some forced conversation) introduced the child to her notice as one of the gate porter's grandchildren.

The Countess, deceived for the moment, took the child, admiringly, on her knee; but, after gazing for a short time into its face, she pushed it suddenly away, crying out, "I see—I see what this is—no, my good woman, there is no resemblance to *you* here."

The child, affrighted at the sudden movement, began to shed real tears, upon which the portress said:—

"Come, my poor darling, thou art not wanted."

But Madame Horn Dupin was conquered: "Give her back to me," she cried.

"Poor child! It is not her fault!" And then she asked, "Who has brought this babe here?"

"Monsieur, your son, himself, madame," answered the portress. "Forgive me if I have offended you . . . . . I thought to give you a pleasant surprise . . . I know nothing . . . . I will now take back the child."

"No," said the Countess, "go fetch my son, and leave me the child."

The portress then discreetly withdrew, and Monsieur Maurice, apprised by her of what had taken place upstairs, came rushing into the presence of his mother, whose arms were opened to receive him and his babe also; and when, at a later hour of the day, he brought home the little Aurore, and laid her on his wife's breast, a ruby ring of great value was

found attached to the tiny fingers of the mediatrix, who thus had unconsciously, but eloquently and successfully, pleaded for her parents' pardon.*

Inevitable after this episode—but still postponed by prejudice as long as possible—was the reconciliation between the mother and daughter-in-law.

Or, to speak more truly, the outward show of such; for impossible was it ever really to reconcile these two beings, who were opposed by race, by temperament, by pride (for the plebeian wife gloried in having sprung from the people, and declared that human creatures of her class had blood more red, and veins more large, than had those degenerate by exclusive descent) and who were set apart by mutual jealousy.

The elder lady at Nohant deplored,

* Madame George Sand always wears this ring.

as a loss to herself, the love and time lavished on his wife by her son; and the wife in Paris resented the claims which were made on the hearts of her husband and child by one who had so long repudiated her.

The young soldier's military duties, however, called him at length into Spain; and thither his wife, about again to become a mother, and his little daughter, then four years of age, followed him. As an Imperial officer's family, they were lodged at Madrid under the same roof as Murat,—in the Palace of the Prince de la Paix,—and here was born to Aurore a blind baby brother; and here she, the predestined child of Fame, first realized to herself, amidst the splendour of her temporary home, and beneath the vivid sky of the South, the fairy tales of which, as a child

in an obscure abode in France, she had already dreamed.

But, in about two months' time, the Châtelaine of Nohant was delighted to receive a letter from her son, which announced his intention of speedily bringing his wife and children to visit his mother.

"I reserve," says he, (in a letter dated Madrid, 12th June, 1808) "I reserve the baptism of my *nouveau né* for the fêtes of Nohant. A fine occasion to make the bells ring, and the village dance . . . . Thou shalt then also see the untameable" (horse) "*Leopardo d'Andalousie*, which I shall beg Deschartres to exercise a little, it being always understood that he must pave his road with mattrasses . . . ."

So in the course of a few weeks there came the joyous young father and mother,

their little girl, *Aurore*—dressed in a Spanish mantilla, and prepared to dance the *Bolero* to grandmamma—the baby boy (the future heir, it was supposed, of Nohant) and the Andalusian horse *Leopardo.*

Madame Dupin stepped forth to receive them, and such as she was when she embraced her namesake and granddaughter, so does she still remain impressed on her memory. — A dignified lady, who looked taller than she was; her countenance calm; her complexion fair; her dress brown silk, with a long train and long waist, in the style, not of the Empire, but of the old Court of France; as was also her blonde and frizzled perruque, and the small lace cap surmounting it.

The Châtelaine of Nohant warmly welcomed her son, and counselled her daugh-

ter-in-law to go to rest with her babe; but to the little Aurore she laid claim as "her own," and at once carried her off to her own state bedchamber, where all the furniture was of the time of Louis XV., and the bed, in the form of a hearse, was adorned with plumes.

And here, looking out from that funereal couch, did Aurore most probably first behold the picture of her ancestress and namesake, Von Kœnigsmark, which has long since hung in the chamber of Madame George Sand, who thus describes it:—"The portrait of the lady still young and of a dazzling beauty. One can see even that she is rouged to sit to the painter. She is quite a brunette, which does not realise the general idea of a beauty of the North. Her hair, black as ink, is held back by clasps of rubies

. . . . Thick tresses fall upon her bosom: she wears the robe of gold brocade covered with precious stones, and the mantle of red velvet, trimmed with sable, in which they found her dressed in her coffin. . . I confess," continues Madame Sand, "that since the history of the exhumation, the portrait makes me feel a little afraid, when, of an evening, it looks at me with its brilliant eyes. It seems then to say to me, 'Why embarrass thy brain with idle trash, degenerate offshoot of my proud race?'"

But in those first hours at Nohant the young Aurore was untroubled by thoughts of the perishable vanity of human life.

On that day, also, did Aurore first see her father's old tutor and her own future preceptor, the eccentric ex-Abbé Deschartres; who, as pedagogue, philosopher,

and physician, exercised no small influence in the Château—to whose inmates he was devoted—and over the whole surrounding neighbourhood.* He scolded those he loved, and beat his patients when they wanted to pay him. He wore short breeches, nankeen gaiters, a nut-brown, square-cut coat, and a helmet cap. With a comical face he intently regarded Aurore, and from the first (despite after-doses of knowledge) prescribed that she

* Under the Empire, the ex-Abbé and former 'Citizen,' Deschartres, was mayor of the village of Nohant. This philosopher had never been in holy orders, although he had, as professor in the College of Cardinal Lemoine, worn the *petit collet*. He was now known amongst the Berrichons by the *sobriquet* of "The Great Man." For many years he expounded the infidel doctrines of his times, but his good heart being at a later period penetrated by regret for the loss of those he most loved on earth, he embraced the Catholic creed of the soul's Immortality.

should make friends with Nature, and eat fruit, and otherwise disport herself in the paradise of childhood.

So thus it came to pass that the first experience of Nohant was pleasant to Aurore — pleasant, notwithstanding the illness and death of her infant brother, whose blindness had only attached the heart of his mother more devotedly to him. Aurore — too soon, alas! to be enlightened — did not then understand what Death was. She did not believe in it; neither, in fact, did her mother; for when the babe was dead and buried in the cemetery outskirting part of the Château gardens, she was seized by a night-panic, lest, being only in a trance, he had been buried alive.

Of illimitable imagination and untutored intellect, this idea took such posses-

sion of her, that at last, her husband — listening to her impassioned language, and becoming as excited as she was—rose from his bed, armed himself with a spade, and hastening to the cemetery under the shadow of night, soon found himself digging, as he supposed, into the newly-made grave of his child.

Labouring hard, he was shocked and astonished, at last, when he came to a coffin, to find that it was that of a villager who had died a few days before, and beside whose grave his own son had been interred; but his nerves being more excited than ever by this discovery, he now set to work in the right direction, and soon lifted up the little coffin from the earth. In doing so, however, he placed his foot on the peasant's bier, and, to his horror, found that in consequence of his

weight,—and possibly also of the slanting ground—the poor man's coffin rose up beside him. It struck him on the shoulder, and threw him backwards into the deep hole which he had dug.

As a pupil of Deschartres, and the son of his mother, he was taught to abjure all superstition, but he afterwards confessed to his wife that this ominous incident had thrilled him with a terror hitherto unknown to him. Recovering himself, however, and filling up the graves so that no signs of that night's work were visible when daylight came, he once more lifted up the child's coffin, and by dawn had conveyed it secretly into his wife's chamber. There, together, they opened it; and there, together, they gazed on the waxen features of their babe in a paroxysm of fear and hope. The mother was the last

to lose the latter; but when even she could not fail to see that death had set its unmistakable seal on the little face she had so loved, she enshrouded her babe afresh, adorning him as though for a christening; and — having scattered fresh rose-leaves over him,— she and her husband once more kissed him in his coffin, and then, before nailing down the lid, which shut him from their sight for ever in this world, they enclosed a paper on which were written his name and age.

The next night the father again sallied forth; but this time he carried the coffin of his child to the foot of an old pear-tree in the garden, where he buried it; and for days afterwards he and his wife were busy on that particular spot planting flowers, and otherwise ornamenting it in a way that surprised the Countess, how,

so soon after their babe's death, they had found a taste for "gardening!" *

But this surprise did not last long. Alas! Too soon was it superseded by a calamity which overwhelmed all other considerations.

On Friday, the 17th September of that same year (1808) the young soldier Maurice, rode off on his horse Leopardo, to dine with some family friends, not many miles distant from Château Nohant. The evening closed, and he had not returned. His wife became restless, and his mother remonstrated with her. The elder lady, as night went on, and Maurice did not come home, was herself secretly uneasy

* Fifteen years afterwards a gardener, digging in this spot, came upon the little coffin, much to his own alarm. The pear-tree exists still, and in spring-time scatters its blossoms on the grave beneath.

lest some accident might have befallen him; but she gave vent to her growing anxiety by lecturing his wife so gravely on her impetuosity of character, that the latter felt awe-stricken, and at last went to bed weeping. Her mother-in-law had, at parting, spoken some kind words of consideration as to her health, and these had helped to subdue her desire to rush forth on the road to meet her husband. Open to kindness, but resisting compulsion, this poor wife was now obedient—more especially as, after Madame Dupin's warnings, she feared by continued and sleepless agitation to mar the beauty which was precious to her because pleasing to her husband. So she tried to be rational, and to rest.

But the Countess, on this occasion, did not practise her own precepts; for, when

left alone, watching and waiting, her anxiety became uncontrollable.

Seldom did this lady of the old *régime* step her foot out-of-doors; the room in which she generally lived was luxurious, and laden with perfumes. This night, she prolonged her accustomed game of piquet with Deschartres, but he, too, was silently suffering with sad forebodings.

Presently the Countess went up to her own chamber, but she could not command herself sufficiently to lie down on the hearse-like bed, with its nodding plumes. Still, she waited, and watched. But the night was far advanced, and her son had not returned. At last, her chamber became too oppressive for her; and, softly leaving it, she crept through the house, and stepped into the garden which surrounded it.

The night was dark and rainy, and she was unprotected against the weather. She wore her usual thin house slippers; but, by degrees, she became so agitated that, forgetting this and everything but the terror which had seized upon her, she walked rapidly forth on the road by which her son ought, long ere this, to have found his way home.

But Deschartres was on this road before her. Unknown to her, he had gone in search of his former pupil. And that pupil,—that husband, son, father, master, —where was he?

Dead.

He had (according to the statement of his servant, Weber, who followed him) mounted the fatal Leopardo to return home; the night was dark; the horse was fiery; a heap of stones stood at a turn

of the road; the horse stumbled; the rider touched him with his spur; Leopardo reared; his rider was thrown; and the groom only came up in time to hear his master moan, "*A moi, Weber! je suis mort!*"

Death was immediate.

When the mother reached the fatal spot, she fell senseless on the body of her son. Together they were lifted into some conveyance, and together they were brought home, accompanied by poor Deschartres, to Nohant. One was placed on her bed speechless; and the other was laid in solemn state.

At six o'clock next morning, the child Aurore was up and dressed, and in her mother's room, watching her, as she, unconscious of the calamity which had enshrouded her life, proceeded to dress herself, expectant of her husband, and to arrange

the long black hair which he admired. In his eyes the wife desired to look beautiful. Radiant with love she was preparing to welcome him home.

Suddenly, Deschartres entered unannounced. The wife turned to look; hoping, doubtless, to see another. But his white face scared her.

"Maurice?" she cried, "Where is Maurice?" Deschartres could scarcely speak, his teeth were clenched; but the terrified wife just heard the words, "He has fallen. No, do not go—stay here. Think of your daughter;" and at last came the doom—"He is dead!"

Then did the child, Aurore, first behold grief. Grief too great for human eyes to look upon, or for human words to tell.

At a later date Aurore found herself

installed permanently at Nohant as the *protégée* and heiress of her grandmother.

But her mother was her first love; and although the visits of Madame Maurice to the Château were, as time went on, more and more rare, she became an object of enthusiastic devotion to her daughter. The young girl, who had never forgotten the sight and sound of her widowed mother's anguish, was drawn by cords of strongest sympathy towards this sole surviving parent; and hence arose a fresh cause of jealousy between the Countess and her daughter-in-law. Mutual love and mutual sorrow, instead of uniting these two natures, were but provocative of much contention, and consequent perplexity and discomfort to Aurore. Madame Dupin, whose love for her son had been the softening influence of her life, did not find it

easier to look up to Heaven after his death than before. But his widow, although abjuring (as did her mother-in-law) priestly intervention, would pass long intervals of passionate emotion in prayer.

The Curé of Nohant seems to have been unable, both by nature and education, to reason with the bereaved mother, or to regulate the spasmodic devotion of the widowed wife, or to implant first principles of religion in the heart of the child.

In course of time Madame Maurice conceived it to be her duty not to interfere with her daughter's future interests, by allowing herself to stand between Aurore and her grandmother; she went to live in Paris: and thus did Aurore gradually lose sight of her mother, the memory of whom she still adored. Her young heart had been deeply touched by her grief; her soul

had been impressed by her prayers; her eyes had been attracted by her beauty; her imagination had in infancy been cradled by her fairy songs.

The grandmother, although she never recovered from the shock of her son's death, was undemonstrative either in sorrow or devotion; she treated Aurore with more equanimity than did her mother; but her presence was calculated rather to awe than to delight the child; and fairy tales she condemned as contrary to common sense.

The grandmother was all philosophy; the mother was all passion; and the child clung to her mother, who (as long as they continued to reside together in those early years) identified herself with her pleasures, even to building a grotto of shells and rock and quartz, in one of the shady

retreats of Nohant, and taming birds, with which they both claimed a mysterious affinity.

But Madame Maurice withdrew from Château Nohant; and not only did the Countess discourage all mention of this absent mother, but at last she succeeded in weaning Aurore's heart from its first allegiance. It was for Aurore, in after years, to find out for herself how much her mother had been wronged and how sharp had been her sufferings. It was for Aurore to feel for herself in after years the recoil of social injustice on the innocent, and to discover for herself the anomalies of her mother's nature — or rather of her education — for her heart, which had been trampled on, was generous; her faith, which was sincere, was undisciplined; her talents, which were

versatile and remarkable, were uncultivated. In a word, the husband was dead, and with him did his widow lose everything,—even his child, Aurore.

Meanwhile, the physical education of Aurore was perfect. Resisting, as it seems, the dry tuition of Deschartres in dead languages, she willingly accompanied him in out-door excursions. Scolded by her *Bonne* for torn garments, she subsequently delighted in being clothed as a young *gamin*, who could indulge in athletic sports without restraint. Upon the birds of the air she exercised a peculiar fascination; with confidence they would flutter around her; and whilst declaring that she inherits this gift from her mother, she still affirms that the bird is a superior being in creation: "He is a songster, he is handsome; he has grace, suppleness,

vivacity, attachment, morality. . . . His flight places him above other creatures."

By gratitude Aurore became more and more attached to her grandmother; and the "Black Valley" of Nohant was to her, on the whole, a happy valley, where her first idealism was derived, not from the teaching of the Catholic Church, but from lonely contemplation and the observation of universal Nature.

Old Madame Dupin, however, was an advocate of social etiquette, and she felt that the "Contract Social" of her time was out of date. So to prepare her granddaughter for the world, she at length sent her to the English convent in Paris, that she might be taught the practices of the Church and other accomplishments of a lady of the nineteenth century.

This was a painful separation for

both the grandmother and the granddaughter; to the latter especially, who was of an enthusiastic nature, and loved, accordingly, not only her grandmother, but her liberty. Although the pupil of Deschartres, she had already read deeply books of her own choosing from the philosophical and romantic library at Château Nohant. She had studied Lavater; and by contemplation of the plates by which the Essay son Physiognomy were illustrated, she had become familiar with the distinctive types of the drunkard, the gourmand, the pedant, the sluggard, &c. Testing these types by the few living faces which surrounded her, she found them true. The drunkard resembled the coachman. The pedant, her village preceptor. The scold, the cook; and so on. Also, having climbed a steep height, or

ensconced herself beneath the deep shade of a tree in the dark valley below; she had, in imagination, emulated and deplored the fate of Corinne, or thrilled at the love and the sorrows of Paul and Virginia.

"Happy time!" she cries: "O my Black Valley! O Corinne! O Bernardin de Saint Pierre! O the Iliad! O Millevoye! O Atala! O willow-trees of the river! O my fled youth! O my old dog, who never forgot his supper hour, and who answered to the far-off sound of the bell by a doleful howl of regret and gluttony."

From all these delights what a change to the convent in Paris! For a short time she found some compensation in the companionship of the other boarders of her own sex and age; but, accustomed to the

indulgence of solitary fancies, she soon became abstracted amongst them.

Aurore, at fifteen years of age, was already an *artiste*. Her soul was prepared to receive new impressions. Her imagination was intense, and easily kindled. Hitherto she knew but little of the doctrines of the Christian faith, or of the practices of the Catholic Church. But, acknowledging, as by inspiration, the lofty philosophy of the one, she was led captive by all that appealed to the senses in the other. The chapel, with its "dim religious light" and emblematic adornments, the pictures of saints and of martyrs, the scent of the flowers upon the altars, the sound of solemn music, were not these as she gazed at the crucifix, sufficient to excite her fancy, and to thrill her soul with rapture?

The devotional works which she read, the daily and voluntary martyrdom which she witnessed, especially excited not only her admiration, but her emulation.

Enthusiastic in her devotion as in all else, Aurore now became ecstatic. Fasting and writhing under self-imposed penance, she would pass whole hours together at the foot of the altar. She abjured the society of the boarders at the convent, and denied herself every pleasure and amusement. Her confessor himself, fearing that, by her austerities, she would destroy her life or reason, interposed, by using his authority in compelling her to engage in diversions that were suitable to her age. Still, it is possible that she would eventually have taken the veil, as she desired to do, had she not been suddenly withdrawn from

the convent to be present at the death-bed of her grandmother, who—after complying with the last forms of the Church to pacify Aurore,—said to her, when dying, "You lose your best friend."

Aurore found herself heiress of Château Nohant, but the opening of the will brought her in close contact with her mother, who, by the late Châtelaine, had been deemed unfit for her guardianship.

Often had the young girl's heart yearned for the first love of her childhood; but now that her mother came forward to assert her rights over her person and her property, Aurore was pained by a new experience.

"My mother," says she, "showed very plainly that she would not submit to the imputation conveyed in the will that she was unworthy to be the guardian of her

daughter; she declared that she was not only my natural and legitimate protector, but that the law itself gave her a right over me. That right was indeed complete and absolute."

But, when Aurore heard this strange parent decry the memory of her grandmother, she desired to return to her convent; her mother, however, not only forbade this return, but prohibited her holding any intercourse, even when in Paris, with her friend and confessor the Abbé de Prémord.

She derided her as "*une dévote! une philosophailleuse!*" and tyrannised over her life, not allowing her to read or to study according to her inclination, and denying her even the society of Deschartres, who had formerly excited her jealousy by his influence at Nohant.

At length Aurore's cousin Auguste,—a cousin on her father's side—sought and found her, with the intention of advising her at all risks to leave her mother. "He declared," says Aurore, "that she dishonoured me in the eyes of the world, and that nobody would pardon me for having done my duty. What, then, according to him and the world, was I called upon to do? To fly from my mother, to injure her, to menace her? All this, which I was instigated to do, has ever since appeared to me impossible and odious.

"He acknowledged that my ideas upon this point were honourable and pious, but I soon found that I must give up either my mother or my father's relations. I loved my relations. . . . My father had cherished them; my grandmother had blessed them; they had smiled on my child-

hood; some of their children were dear to me . . But I quickly decided as to which links must be broken, and I divorced myself from the *noblesse*."

Henceforth Aurore's existence was terrible. "I felt as though my body and my soul were dying together," says she. "To support such an existence it need to be a saint. I was not a saint, notwithstanding my ambition to become one. My whole being was frightfully shaken . . My heart was not less sick than my body. I could no longer pray. I tried to perform my devotions at Easter. My mother would not permit me to go and see the Abbé de Prémord, who might have strengthened and consoled me. I confessed myself, therefore, to a stranger, who, not understanding anything of my self-accusations as to my want of filial respect, asked

me *why* and *how;* and if these revolts of my heart were justified or not by circumstances. 'That is not the question,' replied I to him. 'According to my religion, such revolts are never sufficiently justifiable, not to be combated. I accuse myself of not having sustained that combat with sufficient resolution.'

"He persisted in asking me to make what was, in fact, the confession of my mother. I answered nothing . . Struck by my silence, he at last said, 'If I question you it is to prove you. I wished to ascertain if you would accuse your mother, and since you do not, I see that your repentance is real, and that I may absolve you.'

"I could not look upon this proof otherwise than as a dangerous and inconvenient one for family security, and I re-

solved never again to confess myself to the first priest who might present himself."

In this world it is often difficult to count the links in a chain of consequences, and impossible to trace back effect to its primary cause. Hence, the great need of Charity.

This remark may be pardoned because it is here observable how the life of Aurore was affected by the grief (for her father's death) which, though long shared by her grandmother and mother, had failed to unite them on earth, although they both hoped that in Heaven it would be merged in the joy of re-union with the object of their mutual love.

The fault of which her grandmother had accused herself on her death-bed was, that she had never been able to offer up

this grief as a homage of submission to the Divine Will; and it now appeared from her mother's confession to Aurore, that the sorrows to which she subjected her, flowed from the anguish which in her own heart had embittered the springs of an impassioned but undisciplined nature.

Speaking of her mother, Aurore says:

"She was occasionally frank and tender towards me, and whenever she shed a tear, or exercised a maternal care towards me, I began to love her and to hope; but this hope was always the road to despair: it was crushed on the morrow. Nevertheless, she loved me, or, at least, she loved in me the memory of my father and of my infancy; but she also hated in me the memory of my grandmother. . . 'My only crime,' said she to me, 'is that I have loved . . But scarcely had I

attached myself to thy father, than misfortune and torment began to hunt me down. I was told, I was taught, that I was unworthy to love.' . . At the memory of my father she wept torrents of tears, exclaiming, 'Ah! how good I should have become had we been allowed to grow old together! But God snatched him from me in the midst of my happiness. I inveigh not against God; He is the master; but I execrate mankind, that is,' added she, simply, as if weary of this effusion, '*when I think of it.* Happily, I do not think of it always.'"

It is scarcely to be wondered at that Aurore, forbidden to re-enter the convent, should at length, when marriage was proposed to her, complacently regard an arrangement which would deliver her, as she imagined, from the miseries of her

present life. Formerly, she had been disinclined to the idea of marriage, but now no other path was open to her.

By a mutual understanding, therefore, between her mother and the family of M. le Baron Dudevant, it was settled that she should become the wife of the Baron's son, then twenty-seven years of age. According to French custom in such cases, there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that neither the bride nor the bridegroom pretended to any romantic sentiment in this marriage, which was dictated to them.

It was simply a marriage of convenience.

The bride, in return for the ring through which she sought to escape from her mother, endowed the bridegroom with the inheritance of Nohant, and the family connexions of the bridegroom were flatter-

ing to the pride of the bride's mother, who hitherto had been scorned by society.

In September, 1822, Aurore, at eighteen years of age, became Madame Dudevant, and with her husband went to live at Château Nohant.

But too soon did she discover that marriage, which is the end of woman's life in romance, is only its beginning in reality. Too soon did she find that hopes in which for a moment she had indulged when looking forward to this new life, were but illusions.

She was at home again, but she was desolate. Deschartres, who for some time had been an exile from Nohant, was now permitted by its new lord and master to return; but the old man moped, and subsequently went to live in Paris, where, from his sudden death, he is supposed to

have committed suicide. Meanwhile, one hope alone sustained Aurore,—that of becoming a mother. During the winter months, she sat and sewed, whilst a robin, which had flown in at the window, was her fireside companion.

Monsieur Dudevant was a reformer of the ways of Nohant. Old horses were sold, old dogs were killed, old trees were burnt for firewood. But, in the birth of her son (June 30, 1823), Aurore found ecstatic compensation for many troubles. She called him *Maurice*—after her ancestor, Maurice de Saxe,—and clasped him to her heart, which had yearned so long and in vain for pure love and undivided sympathy.

Not long afterwards, M. and Madame Dudevant sought temporary distraction from the domesticity of Nohant in the nearer neighbourhood of Paris, but here,

as elsewhere, Aurore had need of consolation, and found it in her child. She nursed him herself. Cheerfully, with him in her arms, she went about her household duties.

"Domestic cares," says she, "have never been distasteful to me. I am not one of those sublimities which cannot descend from the clouds. Often, wearied and beset by my own agitations, I could willingly have said,—

"'Happy is he who plants cabbages; he has one foot upon the earth, and the other is only distant from it by the height of the blade of a spade? But this spade-blade,—this something upon which to rest between the earth and my other foot,—is exactly what I wanted then and could not find.'"

Without companionship at home, and debilitated by her duties as nurse to her

child, a feeling of profound sadness and spiritual discouragement overwhelmed her. It was then that once more she determined to seek from the Abbé de Prémord the spiritual guidance of which she felt herself in need.

"My husband," she explains, "was not at all religious, but he found it good that I should be so. I did not speak to him of my internal combats with regard to the faith; he would have understood nothing of an anguish which he had never experienced."

The Abbé recommended her to seek a temporary retreat in the convent, where she had formerly felt as though inspired by Heaven itself. Accompanied by her son, just weaned, Madame Dudevant found herself once more amongst the nuns.

"'I was received into my convent,'

she says, 'with infinite tenderness, and as I was really ill, I was succoured there with maternal care. All that sweet goodness, all those delicate solicitudes recalled to me a sense of happiness, the privation of which had long been insupportable, but nevertheless by contrast they made my present life seem void and its future frightful. With a heart wounded and trembling, I wandered through the cloisters. I inquired of myself whether in leaving this asylum of silence and of ignorance of the things of this world, I had not resisted my destiny, my instincts, my vocation. I entered the little church where I had felt such holy ardour, such divine rapture. I now found nothing there but regret for the days when I had believed myself strong enough to pronounce eternal vows. I! who did not now find myself

strong enough to live in the world. My dear good Mother Alicia encouraged me no more than formerly in nourishing vain dreams. 'You have a charming child,' said she to me; 'you have need of nothing more for your happiness in this world. Life is short.' But another of the sisters thus warned me :—

"'That child so precious to you is but a breath which passeth away. To set your heart upon him is like writing of eternal things upon fleeting dust or shifting sand!'"

Discouraged more than ever, rather than comforted, Madame Dudevant went back from the convent to Nohant.

The cloud of her home-life deepened and darkened, the tempests of her soul increased in strength and frequency, and her physical health visibly declined.

It was then that by medical advice she was ordered to the Pyrenees. Her husband was with her during some time of her absence from Nohant, but not always.

She had letters of introduction to some who could appreciate her intellectual powers, and once away from home the circle of her acquaintance quickly increased.

She now began to feel the charm of social intercourse. She had thought and read more than most women; but little had she known of intellectual sympathy. To her this fascination was new.

She was married by the custom of her country and the law of the land, but it was only now that by contrast she fully realized how dreary and discouraging was the life to which a mere marriage of convenience had condemned her. Had she become a nun, or had her soul and

heart found rest and joy in marriage, the world, though never dazzled by the full blaze of her genius, might have been sanctified by her faith, or edified by her virtues; for, to her, mediocrity only was impossible. But now as a wife, she was, it seems, first addressed in words of love by man, and that man not her husband.

She was still very young, but she was a mother. The memory of her child was a shield of strength; and she returned home to painful realities with a heart unscathed, and a soul, if not untried, at least untarnished.

But, as time rolled on, her life became more and more overshadowed. Another child was born to her. This event, for the moment, had cheered her.

She had tenderly embraced her infant daughter, and called her *Solange*, after

the female patron saint of Berry. But, after weaning this child, the mother's health again declined; although, striving against depression, she sought distraction in literature, in the fine arts, and in science. She not only read eagerly, but she began to write the experiences of her inner life. Occasionally she used her pencil; for an amateur she was an artist of no inconsiderable talent; but with the pencil she merely copied; whilst with the pen she soon began to create. But still there was the gloomy void, the want of sympathy in real life; an agonizing and dangerous want to a sensitive and impulsive woman, or to genius, ere, struggling through its inevitable ordeals, it has gained self-confidence. Her husband expressed sovereign contempt for her intellectual faculties. At this time, just as Madame

Dudevant was inwardly bewailing her lot in life, and was perplexing her brain with the anomaly of social problems, especially that which was represented by her own marriage—a visitor arrived at the Château de Nohant, where she lived. This visitor was Jules Sandeau, who, a Berrichon transplanted to Paris, has since made such literary fame for himself, that he needs no other introduction here than his name.

It was not possible for him to be under the same roof with Madame Dudevant, without discovering her tastes and talents, which were in close affinity to his own.

With the humility which generally accompanies great gifts, she needed encouragement. Sympathy was wanted to develope her genius, and to give wings to her ambition; and this sympathy did Aurore find in him. And to the gay young

Frenchman, what a phenomenon to find in this woman, young, beautiful, gifted, a recluse, who, though capable indeed of exquisite joy or suffering, was cheered only by the love of two little children! But he respected such a life as much as he admired the woman who lived it.

Jules Sandeau returned to Paris from the Vale of Berri; and if he carried away in his heart a sentiment which would influence his destiny both as man and author, it was then hopeless of reciprocation.

Madame Dudevant, about this time, appears gladly to have welcomed the reappearance of another friend (Néraud), who came to resume his abode in her neighbourhood. In this old philosopher and friend Madame Dudevant felt that she could confide; and, in speaking to

him of her increasing depression and its causes, she sometimes threatened suicide.

But Néraud answered, "No ; you will not destroy yourself; your maternal instincts will save you." He sought by various studies, to which she was hitherto a stranger, to distract her mind from brooding over her sorrows.

Out in the fields, down into the depths of the valley, beneath the pure sky, they wandered together in search of plants and in pursuit of butterflies.

"Wouldst thou know," asks she, "the previous life of my friend, Néraud?"

"Here it is.

"Our *Malgache* (I baptized him thus because of the long recitals and fairy-like descriptions of the Island of Madagascar with which, in former times, on return-

ing from his voyages he used to amuse me) enlisted himself in early life beneath the banner of the Republic.

". . He is a little dried-up and copper-coloured man, dressed rather worse than a peasant; an excellent walker; facetious, waspish, brave from cool-blood, running into the midst of every commotion when he was a student, and receiving heavy sabre-cuts on the head, without ceasing to scoff at the *gendarmerie* in the style of Rabelais, for which style he has a particular predilection.

"Divided between two passions, science and politics, he went, instead of pursuing his law studies in Paris, from the Carbonaro club to the school of comparative anatomy; dreaming sometimes of the limbs of the *palæotherium*, of which Cuvier had happened to discover a fossil leg.

"One morning, as he passed a conservatory in the Jardin des Plantes, he saw an exotic fern-plant, which struck him as so lovely in its foliage, and so graceful in its bearing, that it happened to him, as it has often happened to me in my life, he fell in love with a plant; and had no dreams nor desires but of and for it.

"The law, the club, and the palæotherium, all were neglected, and saintly botany became his dominant passion.

"He departed for Africa.

"After having explored the mountainous isles of the South Sea, he returned to France, lean, bronzed, and in rags, having borne the severest privations and the harshest fatigues, but rich according to his heart; *i.e.* furnished with a complete herbal."

Madame Dudevant became the pupil

of her old friend the *Malgache*, in botany and entomology.

"Together we went," says she, "to hunt butterflies in the meadows, when, in the early mornings, their wings were heavy with dew. At noon we captured emerald and sapphire beetles which sleep in the glowing bosom of roses. At nightfall, when the sphinx-moth, with eyes like rubies, buzzes round drooping flowers, and intoxicates itself with the voluptuous fragrance which is then exhaled by them, we posted ourselves in ambuscade so as to seize in its flight the agile but giddy drinker of ambrosia.

"What fine excursions we made together along the banks of the river, and in the damp meadows of the Black Valley! I remember one autumn which was entirely consecrated to the study of mush-

rooms, and another autumn which was not long enough for the study of mosses and lichens.

"Our baggage consisted of a magnifying-glass, a book, a tin box for the reception and preservation of fresh plants, and, above all, of my son, a beautiful child of four years of age, who would not be separated from us, and who then imbibed a passion for natural history which he has never since lost."

And the Malgache, too, then imbibed a passion which he had never yet found. His fair friend "continued to philosophize with him, and to accept his butterflies and his bouquets, but with these he began to offer madrigals to her." With much sorrow she at length understood that she had lost a friend and found a lover. So, likewise, it is said, did M. Dudevant, who

suddenly rousing up from his habitual indifference to aught but his own amusements, his flocks, and his crops, assumed an aspect towards the Malgache, which blighted all hope of future walks and talks.

The Malgache knew that his love was irrational; and grieving that it had exposed the lady to fresh miseries in her home, he set forth once more upon his travels, and thus relieved her of his presence.

Transformed by his new passion the philosopher emulated Petrarch. With his tin-box and magnifying-glass in his hand, and his pipe in his mouth, he started for Vaucluse, resolved to live and to die near that fountain upon the mirror-like waters of which Petrarch had evoked the shade of Laura.

"But," says Aurore, "I did not much

disturb myself concerning this fatal resolution. I knew my Malgache too well ever to believe in his irreparable or inconsolable grief. As long as there are flowers and insects upon earth, Cupid will only waste his arrows upon him."

And Aurore was right, as the result proved; for the Malgache returned, after a time, with his herbal filled with fresh wealth.

Aurore ran out to meet him; "and, laughing, gave him a hearty kiss on each cheek; a tear rolled down each of the botanist's cheeks which she had kissed." His romance was over; but, by subsequent domestic peace and two children, named after his favourite plants, it is to be hoped that he was consoled.

Not so Aurore. The trials and temptations of her life were but beginning.

Heaven was dark, and earth was dreary to her. Sad were the after-revelations of the circumstances which, ultimately, induced her (though still avoiding a legal process) to forfeit her inheritance of Nohant rather than live any longer at that home of her childhood as the wife of a man from whom she differed on all points essential to mutual happiness. An agreement of separation was drawn up, by which the care and companionship of her children were still, in a measure, accorded to her; and Aurore bade farewell to Nohant, to the scenes of her earliest remembrance, to the graves of her father and grandmother, and went to live in Paris.

Long since she has protested against the bad taste of unnecessary public intrusion on private sorrow; suffice it, therefore, here to observe that by her roman-

tic self-sacrifice, M. Dudevant obtained solid advantages, whilst she, having exchanged wealth for liberty, found herself henceforth dependent on her own efforts for subsistence.

She paid a brief visit to her convent, but to her it was no longer a refuge of peace. The fugitive wife was young, and energetic, and ambitious. Great changes had taken place in both her outward and her inner life since she herself had desired to become a nun. Great changes had also recently taken place in the political world of France.

Society was convulsed by the Revolution of 1830. Paris was palpitating from the rebound. The crown was plucked from the brow of legitimacy, because it had aimed at the subversion of liberal institutions.

Charles X., the representative of ancient power, and creeds, and customs, and conventions, was dethroned; and Louis-Philippe, the King of the French, the people's king, had just been exalted by the people's will into his place. And, as M. Sainte Beuve says, "There was something in the condition of women in respect to etiquette, which, under this *coup* of July 1830, had disappeared from France. Woman began to lay claim to freedom."

The writings of Balzac had, as suggested by the author above quoted, undoubtedly done much in exciting women to make this claim, and to no woman in France, perhaps, could those writings appeal and apply more forcibly — if not fatally — than to Madame Dudevant.

With a heart agitated by life's conflicts, with a soul writhing beneath a

sense of human injustice, and with a conscience sceptical as to the sacramental nature of a marriage like her's, which, nevertheless, the church held sacred, and the law of the land declared indissoluble, how could she find repose in the convent? The nuns, could they console her? The priests, could they convince her against her own experience? The former, whose self-abnegation she had once emulated, now seemed to her slaves of a system. They had no answer to the questions by which she was probing her own soul, and whereby she sought to solve the vexed problem of her own life. They had no sympathy for the maternal love which throbbed loudly in her own heart. Once, in former years, when with her infant son she was visiting at the convent, and she feared that he would die, that she would

lose in him her guardian angel and her love upon earth; what echo had these calm, withdrawn existences, to give her passionate cries of grief? To be preached to of resignation by those who had never known a wife's sorrow, nor a wife's joy, nor a mother's ecstasy, was even then unendurable to her spirit, torn by a fierce conflict. And now?

"What enmity hadst thou," she soliloquizes in after-life, "against Heaven, thus to disdain its most magnificent gifts? Is it that the Angel of God had passed before thee under too severe an aspect? Thine eyes could not sustain the splendour of His face, and thou didst fly to escape from Him. Scarcely strong enough to walk, thou didst desire to traverse the dangers of life, embracing with ardour all its realities, and demanding

of them a protection and an asylum against the terrors of thy sublime and awful vision. Like Jacob, thou didst wrestle against it, and like him thou wast vanquished."

Madame Dudevant took a last look at the nuns (one of whom in conducting her through the cloisters prophecied, "Ça va mal!") and then plunged into the world of Paris. But, where find the means of subsistence?

Determined to economize as much as possible, and to maintain her little daughter, who had accompanied her to Paris (her son was in charge of a preceptor), she, the born Châtelaine of Nohant, installed herself in a garret of a house, "*en face de la Morgue.*" She had sought employment of a toy-man and table-stand maker, but from him she received inadequate remuneration. Her mind

naturally turned to literature. Even as a girl, in the convent, she had written a romance, in which, when an impossible hero and heroine had met in a chapel—shaded by Nature's gothic architecture of the trees above it—they, innocent of the language of human love, had nothing there to declare to each other but a mutual determination to take monastic vows. But Aurore had now passed through painful phases.

"Oh!" she cries, "if thou, my aged parent, hadst been here, thy paralytic hand would have been strengthened by love to avert the evils which surround me!"

She remembered how her grandmother, though chiding her for having forgotten the dinner-hour, would let her keep the book which, out of doors, had beguiled the sense of time. To the old lady of the

eighteenth century Routine was Virtue; but she feared no evil to the child of another generation in the romances which were to be found in her own library.

Yet what ideal sorrows over which that child had wept could portray the anguish of life to her now as woman! And so she, too, determined to become an author.

To this end, she felt the need of a public library, wherein, at a moment's notice, she could not only seek for necessary references, but where she could write without danger of her fingers being frozen.

In the midst of Paris, the public library stood ready and open to receive her; a neighbour was willing to undertake the charge of her child during her absence, which was a household economy; but Madame Dudevant, young and

attractive, soon found the inconvenience of walking to and fro the streets of Paris, and exhibiting herself in public, unattended. Besides, her costume, which was suitable to her as the Châtelaine of Nohant, was unsuitable to the mode of her present life.

Suffering under these inconveniences, her mind naturally reverted to the independence of her life in former years. She remembered the ease with which, clothed as a rustic *gamin*, she used then to ride, and to shoot, and to climb.

She had now a mountain to climb; and, to enable her to reach its summit, she adopted out-door male attire.

By this resolution she realised a sense of liberty which enchanted her. Each tap of her boot upon the pavement of Paris, echoed upon her ear like a clap of con-

gratulation. Without fear of insult she could now go wherever, for the purposes of study, she might desire to go.

Concerning this change in her costume, she reminds us that Balzac had said, "To be a woman in Paris requires at least 25,000 francs of rent," and in this paradox of elegance was involved a problem which she solved by practising the proverb, that Genius owns neither sex nor age.

But, though dressed as a Paris student in his first year, Aurore did not show herself in a theatre alone until one night, when a new play ("The Reine d' Espagne," by Delatouche) was represented, a ticket having been given to her on that occasion by the author.

"I strutted in," she says, "dressed in my grey riding-coat, and placed myself under a box where Mademoiselle Leverd,

an actress of great talent, who had been pretty, but who was disfigured by the small-pox, displayed a superb bouquet, which presently she let fall on my shoulder.

"I was not versed in my new character to the point of raising it from the ground.

"'Young man,' said she to me in a majestic tone, 'my bouquet!' I turned a deaf ear.

"'You are not very gallant,' said an old gentleman at my side to me, and who darted forward to pick up the bouquet. 'At your age I should not have been so absent!'

"He presented the bouquet to Mademoiselle Leverd, who thanked him, lisping and saying, 'Ah, indeed! Is it you, Monsieur Rollinat?' And together they talked of the new piece.

"'Pshaw!' said I to myself, 'here am

I near a countryman who may possibly recognise me, although I have no recollection of ever having seen him; for M. Rollinat, senior, was the first lawyer in our department.' Whilst he was talking with Mademoiselle Leverd, M. Duris-Dufresne (the deputy), who had previously seen me in my disguise, came towards me to say good evening to me, and seating himself in the vacant place of M. de Rollinat, spoke to me, I remember, of Lafayette, with whom he wished me to make acquaintance. M. Rollinat came back to his place, and they conversed together in a low voice; then Dufresne retired, bowing to me with a little too much reverence for the costume which I wore. Fortunately the lawyer, Rollinat, did not observe this extreme politeness, and said to me, whilst reseating

himself; 'and so it seems that we are countrymen. Our deputy has just told me that you are a very distinguished young man. Pardon me, but I should have said a child, to look at you. What age are you? Fifteen years — sixteen years?'

"'And you, sir,' said I to him, 'you — who are so distinguished a lawyer — what age then are you?'

"'Oh, I!' replied he, laughing, 'I am more than seventy years of age.'

"'Well then, sir,' I answered, 'you are like me, you do not appear to be so old as you are!'

"The answer pleased him, and conversation set in. Although I may never have had much wit as a woman, yet such as I then possessed was certainly more than that of a raw collegian. Good Father

Rollinat was so struck with my *high intelligence*, that he several times cried out, 'Singular! singular!' He took me into his friendship, asked me my name, and engaged me to go and see him. I told him some fancy name, which he was astonished not to know, and I promised that I would see him in Berry. He concluded by saying to me:—

"'M. Dufresne, our deputy, did not deceive me: you are a remarkable child. But I find you weak in your classical studies. You tell me that your relations have brought you up at home, and that you have not passed, nor expect to pass, your classes. I see well that that sort of education has its good side: you are an *artiste*, and upon all that concerns idea or sentiment, you know more than is compatible with your age; you have a suitableness and ease of language, which

makes me believe that some day you will be able to write with success. But attend to your classical studies. Nothing can compensate for the want of those. I have twelve children. I have sent all my boys to college. Not one of them has your precocity of judgment, but they are all capable of prospering in the different professions which they have chosen; whilst you,—you are forced to be an *artiste*, and nothing else. And if you miscarry in art, you will much regret not to have received a regular education."

Henceforth the sight of the "remarkable youth" was familiar to many in Paris; where, as declared by the memory of contemporaries:—

"She was to be met with in the streets, in the promenades, and upon the boulevard, dressed in a little grey riding-coat," (the prevailing fashion of which, however,

she herself explains, was favourable to her modesty as a woman, being made long and loose) "upon the collar of which coat hung curls of the most beautiful black hair in the world. She held a cane in her hand, and walked with the most perfect grace and ease."

At home, in her garret facing the Morgue, she had at this time the companionship of her daughter Solange. Rather than be dependent upon the bounty of the husband she had enriched, Madame Dudevant cheerfully endured all sorts of privations. She willingly performed menial services for herself and her child, her only attendant being the house porteress; but she grieved much to see that her child, who had hitherto been reared in the luxuries of Château Nohant, did not accustom herself to the humble con-

dition of life which she herself had voluntarily adopted. But, when cultivating a pot of mignonette upon her window-sill, Madame Dudevant made acquaintance with some next-door neighbours,—excellent and respectable people, and to them she consigned the care of her child during the hours of her absence from home.

This arrangement was a great boon to both mother and child. By it Madame Dudevant saved various logs of fire-wood, each of which, necessary to warm the child, was an object of positive consideration to her, so absolutely poor was she; and by it also did Solange gain young companions, who helped to cheer her in the unfamiliar scenes in which she found herself.

M. Dudevant by no means showed any disapprobation of the mode of life to which

his wife had condemned herself; and even, some few years afterwards, when it was condemned by society, he wrote to her whilst she was in Italy "in a tone of good friendship and of perfect satisfaction, and advised her particularly how to take care of her health."

He even went to see her at one time in Paris, (upon the occasion, it seems, of his visit to the capital in order to enter their little son, Maurice, as a student in the College Henri IV.)

"We did not lodge under the same roof together," says she, "but he dined with me, and took me to the theatre. He seemed to me satisfied with the arrangement which rendered us, without quarrels and without any questions, independent of each other."

Not so the dowager Madame Dude-

vant. "She asked me why I remained at Paris so long without my husband. I told her that my husband found it a good arrangement.

"'But is it true,' replied the Baroness, 'that you intend to *print* books?'

"'Yes, Madame,' I answered.

"'Bah! *Tiens!*' she cried, 'that is a droll idea.'

"'Yes, Madame.'

"'It is *belle et bonne*,'* she said; 'but I hope that you will not put your name, which is mine also, upon the *covers of printed books?*'

"'Oh! certainly not, Madame,' said I, 'there is no danger of that.'"

In December, 1831, M. Dudevant

* *Belle et bonne*, the sobriquet by which Voltaire distinguished his adopted daughter, Madame de Villette.

wrote to his wife to this effect: "I shall go to Paris, but I shall not alight at thy residence; I wish not to constrain thee, any more than I desire to be constrained by thee."

But, whilst M. Dudevant lived upon her property, it was essential that for a part of each year she should also herself be resident there.

This arrangement, which was necessary for the sake of the children, she had promised to observe, without foreseeing, in her eagerness to gain her liberty, all the miseries to which it would subject her.

The fulfilment of this clause in the agreement (of which M. Dudevant thought at first that she would soon tire), was a greater penance than the privations which

she endured in her life of poverty on the Quai St. Michel.

Previously to her separation, she had for some time lived, though under the same roof with her husband, divorced from him.

"When this divorce," says she, "had been quietly but irrevocably accomplished, I essayed to continue the routine of domestic existence, which nothing externally had either deranged or modified; but that was impossible.

"I then took up my abode in the boudoir formerly occupied by my grandmother, because, as there was only one door to it, nobody could demand a passage through that room. . . . My two children inhabited the ante-chamber. I could hear them breathe. . .This boudoir was so small, that with my books and my flintstones

(I had always a taste for natural history, without ever learning anything of it) there was no room left." . . . And so at this period she slung up a hammock, in which to dream, as she drifted away on the troubled waters of life.

As an excuse for this exclusive devotion to her children, she says: "By Heaven alone are true affections given and reclaimed."

It is scarcely to be expected that M. Dudevant could appreciate his wife's practical or poetical philosophy, although he may be to blame as its originator; but, nevertheless, there seems no doubt that it was with his full sanction that she left him.

The temporary return to Nohant after her first absence of three months' duration, was a terrible ordeal to Madame Dude-

vant. To live in the home of her childhood as no longer its mistress; to behold, as a stranger, scenes the most familiar; to shun, as though guilty, the gaze of those who had formerly been her dependants:—all this was intolerable. In anguish, she called on the dead to help her: "O grandmother! rise, and come to seek me; come to succour and console me." The home of her youth was now to her a prison of dreary desolation.

"I no longer regarded Nohant as a thing which belonged to me. My children's room, and my cell adjoining it, were a neutral ground in which I encamped myself; and if things displeased me elsewhere beneath that roof, I had nothing to say, and said nothing. I could not complain that the liberty which I had freely granted was freely used."

But, however equivocal her present position in this home of the past, Madame Dudevant was much beloved by the poor in her neighbourhood. For years she had been their friend in sickness and in sorrow. Her husband, who at the time of her leaving him owed her 1500 francs pension, had previously complained loudly at the infringements of her almsgiving on their income, and interdicted it. But when she had no longer money to give to the poor, she succoured them in other ways, and especially by becoming a village doctor amongst them. "My husband was willing enough to leave me to my readings and to my decoctions. Had I asked him for the moon, he would have answered me, laughing, 'Only have the wherewithal to pay for it, and I will buy it for you;' and had I declared a wish to

see China, he would have answered me, 'Get money, arrange that Nohant yield money, and go to China.'"*

There were some occasions, however, when visitors at Nohant required the presence of Madame Dudevant when it was known that she was there.

Then, with reluctance would she leave her "neutral encampment," and be compelled to come in contact with her husband.

Upon one of these occasions, when summoned by M. Dudevant to the reception rooms, she found herself face to face with M. Rollinat, her friend at the theatre. The old gentleman, without the least pre-

* When Madame Dudevant first went to Paris, her husband agreed to make her an allowance out of her own property. But he had failed to fulfil the contract.

vious suspicion of her identity with the "remarkable youth," of whom he had often since spoken, had requested M. Dudevant to present him to her. She recognised him instantly, but imagined that in a costume and under circumstances so different to those of their first meeting, he would not know her.

She was quickly undeceived; for M. Rollinat looked at her face, jumped up in surprise with the agility of a young man, and then exclaimed, "The same! It is he! It is she! How could I have been such a fool!"

From that time began Madame Dudevant's friendship with the Rollinat family, which friendship has since helped to solace her life.

The period of which we now write

was a period of great gloom in Paris,—a gloom which was only illumined meteor-like by the fierce excitement of politics.

The cholera burst forth just as Madame Dudevant at length installed herself permanently on the Quai St. Michel, and had there, in company with her daughter, irretrievably arranged a life of independence.

Terrified for her child's safety, the mother thought for a moment of sacrificing her personal feelings to this one fear, by craving a shelter for Solange at Nohant. But she was told that change of air and removal would be more likely to develope disease than otherwise.

Thus persuaded, Madame Dudevant remained with her child in Paris, in want almost of the necessaries of life, working with her hands for a scanty subsistence,

and constantly watching anxiously over the young existence, which was more precious to her than her own.

She remained in Paris through that period of gloom and excitement, funerals constantly passing beneath her window, and a fierce struggle going on in the streets between armed men and a lawless mob. With difficulty did she succeed in calming and hushing her child to sleep, for the child was frightened at the sound of the fusillade; and whilst men, wounded and dying, were uttering moans and execrations out-of-doors, and women were shrieking in terror for the safety of their husbands, their fathers, their brothers, or were lamenting loudly over the slain, Madame Dudevant was forced to control herself, and to soothe the plaintive cries of the little one she loved, and who she

feared might be snatched from her on the morrow,—cries for Nohant, for the absent brother, her playfellow; and even for her father, deserted by the mother who clasped her to her breast.

It was a time of contention, of discontent, of restlessness, of change. Society was convulsed when Madame Dudevant, a wife at war with her husband, took up her abode permanently in Paris. It was a time of desperation in the political world, and upon many private lives its influence was manifested. Death seemed to grin in mockery at the conventions which were unsettled, and at the creeds which were shaken. "It was a time of fear and irony," says Madame Dudevant, "of consternation and impudence; some men were weeping over the ruins of their first illusions, others were laughing at their first

steps on the ladder of unholy triumph; nobody believed any longer in anything. Some were sceptical because they were discouraged by their experience of life, others because they were atheists."

And now we shall see what came of that time to her — to this impassioned woman of genius, struggling against Fate.

END OF VOLUME I.

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